

J. Gordon Melton

Volume 1

RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOLIDAYS, FESTIVALS, SOLEMN
OBSERVANCES, AND SPIRITUAL COMMEMORATIONS



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Religious Celebrations

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Religious Celebrations

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOLIDAYS,
FESTIVALS, SOLEMN OBSERVANCES,
AND SPIRITUAL COMMEMORATIONS

Volume One

A–K

J. Gordon Melton, Editor

with

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Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

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Introduction

Among the most ambiguous aspects of religious life are the celebrations that mark the high points of the religious calendars. Almost every religious group, from the most traditional to the most modern and secular, has designated times to remember the more important truths advocated by the community, the major events that shaped the particular group's life, and the men and women who became the super-heroes of the faith. At the same time, while worship and the ritual life of different communities have been studied and the insights gained from such studies integrated into the overall study of the world's religions, only rarely have religious holidays been singled out for any systematic study of the emergence and maintenance of spiritual life. It is the goal of this encyclopedia to begin to address this lacunae in religious studies by assembling in one place descriptions of the major holidays celebrated by the several large religious communities (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Bahá'ís, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians), holidays specific to the various subgroups of the larger religions (such as Vaishnava Hindus, Japanese Buddhists, Shi'a Muslims, Protestant Christians), and the unique occasions observed by the many newer and smaller groups (including contemporary Pagans, the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the Self-Realization Fellowship).

Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations includes some 600 entries, beginning with a set of entries describing the background of the major religious traditions and their holidays. Separate entries cover the liturgical year of the major faiths. Then some 550 entries cover the individual holidays of the different religions.

Once begun, choosing which holidays to feature proved a formidable task as soon as we moved beyond the relatively few major holidays of the larger world religions. The number of religious groups continues to multiply exponentially, and the number of holidays about which we are now aware also continues to grow. It is no exaggeration to state that, with the exception of Islam, the larger religious traditions have developed multiple items to commemorate almost every day of the year—headed by the celebration of the birth or the memorial of the death of famous exemplars of the faith, and/or the commemoration days of various supernatural entities.

The celebrations covered here highlight the great diversity of the different religions, reflective of the well-documented diversity of religious thought and practice around the world. Amid the significant diversity in celebrations, however, a variety of patterns did emerge. Certain days in the calendar year, such as a country's New Year's Day or the summer solstice, appear as celebrative occasions in a wide variety of religious traditions. Celebrations also tend to provoke the same activities regardless of the faith of the community; on the one hand, solemn occasions may be marked with fasting and prescribed traditional garments, or on the other extreme, by feasting, the consumption of special designated foods, and the wearing of new, fancy apparel.

Liturgical Calendars

The assembling of entries on any particular religion also leads to a consideration of the annual cycle of celebrations that religions, more or less self-consciously, tend to evolve, what in the West is considered the liturgical calendar. Early in its formative years, the Jewish community developed a cycle of celebrations around the agricultural year and the formative events of the Exodus. The Jewish founders of Christianity began with the spring festivals of Judaism and then, over several centuries, designated a cycle of celebrations drawing in part on the Roman (Julian) solar calendar, but filling the content with reflections on the founding events of the new faith. The process was complicated from the second century forward by the absence of records referring to the dates upon which the events recorded in the Christian New Testament actually occurred, a fact that would lead to a variety of controversies about the proper dating of their commemoration. Eventually, in large part due to the several centuries of suppression and a desire not to forget the many martyrs of the faith, the Christian calendar expanded to the point that multiple celebrations would be designated for most days of the year.

Hinduism, which emerged as a set of religious communities following distinct traditions (sampradayas), now has three major liturgical calendars for the three largest sampradayas—the Vaishnavas, Saivites, and Shaktiite or Goddess communities. Each of these three sampradayas has their own set of holidays, devoted to a distinct set of deity figures, and commemorated with unique rituals. Hindus see their deities as having a birthday or special commemorative days each year, and as Christians have filled the calendar with commemorations of martyred saints, so Hindus have filled their calendar with special days to focus on the hundreds of deities. The celebrations of the more important figures such as Krishna and Rama have become widely acknowledged national holidays in India and throughout the Indian diaspora in the West.

Buddhists built their calendar initially around the major events in the life of their founder, Gautama Buddha, and the seasons of the Indian year, during which the lengthy rainy season became the key event marking the life of the community of monks. Then as Buddhism flowed to different countries, it adapted the several events in the calendar to local conditions and special occurrences in the

transmission of Buddhism to create a set of Buddhist calendars appropriate to its many international settings.

Islam has been the most reluctant of the major traditions to expand its calendar of celebration. The year for the majority (Sunni) of Muslims is anchored in the monthlong fast of Ramadan, and a relative handful of additional holidays. The Shi'a community has added a few days memorializing its founding figures, and the Sufis have added celebrations of various saintly figures, though these as a whole remain local affairs involving pilgrimages to the saint's tomb.

A review of the Bahá'í Faith is particularly edifying. It is the newest of the major world religions and underwent some significant repression during its founding years. Through the 20th century, it went through a lengthy process of establishing a new Bahá'í calendar and designating holy days, including commemorations of the births and deaths of the faith's early founder and leaders. In a century, the Bahá'ís accomplished what sometimes took other religions multiple centuries to complete. Meanwhile, a few of the 20th-century new religions have moved to create an annual cycle of celebration within their first generation of existence.

Most new religions are variations of old religions and inherit the celebrations of the tradition into which they fit. New Christian groups commonly follow the celebrations of their parent body, holidays rarely being an issue leading to schism. Christianity has given birth to groups that have adopted an iconoclastic approach to the liturgical year. Protestants jettisoned many holidays and commemorations of the Roman Catholic Church that they felt to be unbiblical, and some modern post-Protestant groups have jettisoned all of the peculiarly Christian holidays and have reinstituted a celebration of those Jewish holidays described in the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament).

The development of liturgical calendars leads to the phenomenon of the calendar itself. Over millennia, different cultures in widely separated parts of the world developed a variety of calendars, some based on the movement of the moon (lunar), and others of the sun (solar), with a few drawing on both lunar and solar movements. The cycles of celebration for any given religious group have followed the local calendars in use as the cycle evolved. The overrunning of a land by foreigners that followed a different calendar occasionally threw the local religious community into a period of chaos, suppression, and/or recalibration of its schedule of celebrations. Among the subtle but important differences in calendars would be the assignment of the time when a new day began, which by convention might be at dawn, sunset, or midnight.

The use of lunar calendars has given birth in the modern world to what are known as movable feasts—celebrations that occur on a different day each year on the Common Era calendar (a solar calendar). Islam, for example, operates on a purely lunar calendar, and its annual holiday cycle changes by 11 days on the solar calendar each year. Christianity has two liturgical cycles—one based on the designated birthday of Jesus Christ, which is set on December 25 on the Common Era calendar; and one anchored in Easter, the celebration of his death and resurrection,

which is based in part on lunar activity and hence moves back and forth over several weeks in the spring. Most Hindu events are set on a lunar calendar that is coordinated with the Indian solar calendar, but whose months always begin with the new moon. Thus, Hindu holidays will, like Easter, move a few weeks back and forth each year on the solar calendar. In the West, where the Hindu lunar calendar is virtually unknown, Hindu temples regularly publish an annual calendar informing members of the exact date of that year's cycle of holiday events.

The 19th and 20th centuries have seen a significant decline in the number of calendars in use and the superseding of numerous calendars by governments that have adopted the new Common Era calendar (which evolved from and is often confused with the Gregorian calendar). The Common Era calendar has been developed in the scientific community out of the need for ever-more precise calculations of the movement of the heavenly bodies and the measurement of time. Its spread has been greatly motivated by the needs of international trade and transportation schedules. Since its introduction early in the 20th century, the Common Era calendar has become the most widely used calendar worldwide, and where not in use has prompted the development of local equivalents (most notably in India). Most important for religious communities, the Common Era calendar has limited the use of many older calendars (such as the Julian calendar used by many Eastern Orthodox Christians, and many national calendars in use in the various states of India and the countries of southeast Asia) to a purely ritual use in setting the annual cycle of community celebrations for a single ethnic or language group. Knowledge of these calendars and the calculation involved in coordinating them with the Common Era calendar is also increasingly limited to a few scholars and religious specialists. Even as traditional calendars have been pushed aside, the numerous efforts at calendar reform have contributed to the increasing religious pluralism as an additional issue leading to the splitting of religious communities.

The Importance of Festivals and Holiday Celebrations

The special occasions commemorated by religious groups serve a number of important functions for religious communities. Most visibly, they serve as a moment to allow the religious sentiments, which take second place in the normal routines of daily life, to come to the fore and, for a brief period, take control. For believers, it is often a time for extremes; different occasions may, on the one hand, become a time for concentrated spiritual activity marked by intense devotional activity in a self-disciplined and self-denying manner; or on the other extreme, a time for a massive communal party signaled by overindulgence and seeming frivolity, with all shades in between. It is almost always a time to retell the stories of the rationale for the holiday. Why celebrate? To remember a religious exemplar, to remember the community's coming into existence (or its liberation from oppression), to establish the significance of an important Truth, or to mark the beginning and end of a period of intense activity (the planting and harvesting of crops).

By their very nature, holidays also invite outsiders and observers to consider what is so important for the community that it would stop normal activity to commemorate. Its holidays become windows into the soul of a religious community.

For many, religious holidays are the occasion to put the religious side of life first. Thus, many are focused on a fast, none more notable than the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast daily between dawn and dusk. Vaishnava Hindus have designated the 11th day of each half of the lunar month as a fast day. Christians regularly have a period of fasting, commonly from sunset the evening before their important commemorations beginning soon after dawn, which are then followed by a break-fast, a meal that ends the fast.

Often accompanying fasts are rituals of purification. For Hindus, a bath in a local river or lake or even in one's home, and on special occasions in one of India's sacred rivers, begins the day of fasting. The time during the fast is to be spent in prayer or meditation, attention to a special ritual format, the reading of scripture, and/or attendance at the local temple. The climax of the day(s) activity is the breaking of the fast, which may or may not be in the form of a feast.

Holidays may also become a time to be up and about performing some special religious activity. In almost all religions, processions/parades are popular, and people will travel great distances to witness and/or participate. People will also travel to visit holy sites and, once on site, may engage in a variety of activities, among the most popular being the circumambulation of the site or an object found at the site. On many occasions, the journey to the site becomes a pilgrimage, and all or part of it may be made on foot. The more arduous the journey, the more merit it attains, and pilgrimages occasionally become a time to engage in penitential acts as the pilgrim adheres to traditional rules for a specific pilgrimage.

Most importantly, holidays are times to remember, and to receive inspiration from reflection upon the high points of one's religious heritage. It is a time to set aside the mundane, and solemnly consider the spiritual values offered by participation in one's faith; or joyously and flamboyantly demonstrate the benefits of being in relation to Truth and the community that shares that Truth. The holiday also focuses on hope that eventually all people will share in the benefits and joys of one's individual faith.

Among the more interesting phenomena relative to religious holidays are the celebrations of the modern community of Unbelief, which includes the spectrum from religious humanists who have a religion without deities, the supernatural, or worship, to atheists who denounce and oppose all religion. As modern communities of Unbelievers have emerged through the 20th century, they have proposed a set of holidays that, similar to religious holidays, commemorate the heroes of Unbelief such as Thomas Paine and Charles Darwin, and celebrate the truths that Unbelievers hold dear, such as the privileging of logic and reason over what is considered irrational faith. Celebrations are also designed to remember the struggle to bring the Unbelief community into existence and to motivate Unbelievers to realize the hope of a society in which belief in God has become a thing of the past.

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of (November 28)

The Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, like the Day of the Covenant (November 26), is a Bahá’í holy day honoring ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), who succeeded Bahá’u’lláh (1819–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith, and led the Bahá’í community from 1892 to 1921. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fulfilled a triple role, in that he was not only Bahá’u’lláh’s designated successor, but was authorized by Bahá’u’lláh as the inerrant interpreter of the latter’s teachings and was also regarded as the paragon, or perfect exemplar, of Bahá’í ethics, virtues, and wisdom.

The Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commemorates the death—and, retrospectively, the life—of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who passed away quietly in his home on November 28, 1921, in Haifa, Palestine (now Israel), at the age of 77. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was well known in Palestine and abroad. One instance of this will illustrate the point: Immediately upon learning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death, Winston Churchill, then British secretary of state for the colonies, telegraphed to the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, who was the highest-ranking official in the country, instructing him to “convey to the Bahai Community, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, their sympathy and condolence on the death of Sir ‘Abdu’l Bahá ‘Abbas.” Here, reference to the title “Sir” refers to the knighthood of the British Empire that was conferred on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at a ceremony in the garden of the military governor of Haifa on April 17, 1920, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humanitarian work in Palestine during World War I.

Arrangements for the funeral were made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister, Bahíyyih Khánum. The funeral procession for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took place on November 29, 1921. An estimated 10,000 townspeople joined together in the procession, acclaimed as the largest and most memorable funeral event the city of Haifa had seen. The casket was carried from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, at the foot of Mount Carmel, to a garden facing the Shrine of the Báb, approximately midway up the northern slope of Mount Carmel. The procession itself took two hours for the casket to be carried a distance of just under a mile. Describing the procession, Shoghi Effendi (1898–1957), grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith (1921–1957), wrote, in part:

The coffin containing the remains of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was borne to its last resting-place on the shoulders of His loved ones. The cortège which preceded it was led by the City Constabulary Force, acting as a Guard of Honor,



‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States)

behind which followed in order the Boy Scouts of the Muslim and Christian communities holding aloft their banners, a company of Muslim choristers chanting their verses from the Qur’án, the chiefs of the Muslim community headed by the Muftí, and a number of Christian priests, Latin, Greek and Anglican. Behind the coffin walked the members of His family, the British High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, the Governor of Phoenicia, Sir Stewart Symes, officials of the government, consuls of various countries resident in Haifa, notables of Palestine, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and

Druze, Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Europeans and Americans, men, women and children. The long train of mourners, amid the sobs and moans of many a grief-stricken heart, wended its slow way up the slopes of Mt. Carmel to the Mausoleum of the Báb (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 313).

At the funeral ceremony itself, nine eulogies, eloquent and moving, were given by dignitaries representing the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. The Mufti of Haifa, Shaykh Muḥammad Murád, lamented the loss of Haifa’s great benefactor: “Abdul-Baha was great in all the stages of his life. He was genius itself, high in character and had the best reputation. . . . To whom shall the poor now look? Who shall care for the hungry? and the desolate, the widow and the orphan?” (See Bagdadi, *Star of the West* [1922]; and Balyuzi, ‘*Abdu’l-Bahá*, 466–72.) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had great compassion for the poor and ministered to their needs practically every afternoon of his life in Haifa, even on his wedding day.

Bahíyyih Khánúm opened ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament to see if it contained any instructions for the burial. Since no specific instructions were given, she decided to inter him in a place of enduring honor. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s casket, after mourners had paid their respects, was interred in the Shrine of the Báb, in a vault beneath the floor of the north central room, next to the very room where the Báb’s remains are entombed.

The governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, commented: “I have never known a more united expression of regret and respect than was called forth by

the utter simplicity of the ceremony.” Sir Herbert Samuel wrote: “A great throng had gathered together, sorrowing for his death, but rejoicing also for his life” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 312).

For several days after, some 50 to 100 of the poor were fed each day at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, culminating, on the seventh day, in a mass distribution of grain. On the 40th day after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing, a memorial feast was held in accordance with Muslim customs, and additional eulogies were given.

Obituaries were published in major newspapers in the Middle East, Europe, the United States, and India, such as: *Times* (London), November 30, 1921 (“‘Abdul Baha was a man of great spiritual power and commanding presence and his name was held in reverence throughout the Middle East and elsewhere”); *New York World*, December 1, 1921; *Daily Mirror*, December 2, 1921; *Le Temps*, the leading French paper, December 19, 1921; *Times of India*, January 1922; and others. Locally, the Haifa newspaper, *Annafir* (December 6, 1921), published an obituary that carried the headline: “The Most Great Calamity—The Departure of the Personification of Humanitarianism, Abdul-Baha Abbas” (Bagdadi, *Star of the West*, 259–67).

The term “Ascension,” of Christian origin, is a reverential term, implying that the person referred to, by virtue of a high spiritual station, “ascended” to heaven and dwells in Paradise. For Bahá’ís, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, although not a prophet, occupied a unique and pivotal station.

At such commemorations, Bahá’ís typically gather together in an assembly hall or private home (depending on the size of the local Bahá’í community) and, in a dignified atmosphere, respectfully recite or chant prayers and passages from the sacred Bahá’í Writings. A special “Prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and now recited by his loved ones at his hallowed shrine” was translated by Shoghi Effendi in January 1922. This “Tablet of Visitation” for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá captures the quintessence of his character, expressed in this supplication: “Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me.” For Bahá’ís, this prayer is especially significant by virtue of this promise preceding the prayer: “Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervor will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face” (*Bahá’í Prayers*, 234).

Christopher Buck

See also Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Ascension of; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Abhidhamma Day

Abhidhamma Day is a Theravada Buddhist celebration observed primarily in Myanmar (Burma) that has grown out of a tradition concerning the origins of the Abhidhamma, a major segment of the Pali Canon, the holy texts of Theravada Buddhism. The Abhidhamma literature is a collection of commentaries on the sutras, the books generally believed to be the discourses of the Buddha. One tradition suggests that the Abhidhamma developed when the Buddha visited his deceased mother in Tusita heaven and taught her about the Dharma, during the Rainy Season Retreat (Vassa Retreat) seven years after his enlightenment. He did this each night, and during the next day, he repeated the same teachings to Sariputra. Sariputra memorized and recited the entire comments to his disciple, who in turn passed them down generation by generation until they were recited at the Third Council of Buddhism, held at Pataliputra in 251 BCE. At that time, all seven books were recited accurately by Revata, and then later put in written form.

According to this tradition, following his enlightenment, the Buddha was filled with compassion for the various deities (*devas*) and brahmas were believed to dwell there. By this time, his mother, who had passed away shortly after his birth, had been reborn in the Tusita heaven, one of the heavenly realms in Buddhist cosmology. There she was now known as Santusita Deva. He thus went to the celestial abode and preached the Abhidhamma to both his mother and the assembly of the heaven’s divine and semi-divine beings. The preaching activity continued for three months.

When the Buddha completed his work in heaven, he asked permission of the king of the celestial realm to return to his work in the human realm. On hearing this, the king made available three stairways, one made of silver, one of gold, and one of ruby.

The stairways originated at the mythical Mount Meru and returned the Buddha to the human world at Sankisa, a town in central Uttar Pradesh, India. The Buddha selected the middle (ruby) stairway, and as he descended, he was accompanied by devas who played musical instruments and fanned him as he descended to earth. The brahmas on the silver stairway held a white umbrella to shade the Buddha.

Upon his return, the Buddha made it possible for the humans awaiting his return to see the heavenly beings who accompanied him and the celestial world they inhabited. Simultaneously, the heavenly beings saw the humans who had gathered to welcome the Buddha home.

Abhidhamma Day, celebrating the return of the Buddha after having completed his heavenly task, is held on the full moon of the seventh month of the Burmese lunar year (usually the full moon in October on the Common Era calendar), which coincides with the end of the rainy season retreat for the monks. On that day, Burmese Buddhists will gather at temples to offer lights before the statues of the Buddha. In some temples, it may be a day for holding the precepts receiving ceremony, in which the priest will invest and the congregation will accept the Five Precepts (Panca Sila), which are the five elements of right action: no killing, no stealing, no sexual immorality, no lying, and no taking of intoxicants. These five precepts form a basic Buddhist behavioral code (similar to the Ten Commandments in the Jewish and Christian traditions).

Abhidhamma Day is also known as Thadingyut.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anapanasati Day; Asalha Puja Day; Lha Bab Duchan; Vassa.

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Aboakyer Festival

The Aboakyer (animal catch) Festival is a celebration of the Simpafu (or Effutufo) people in and around Winneba, a town on the southern coast of Ghana. The festival commemorates the settlement of the people in the area following a migration from the western Sudan in the middle of the first millennium CE. Once in the area, they provided a place for their deity at a site name Penkye, and they called their god Penkyi Otu.

The people today tell the story that soon after their arrival in their present home, while consulting the deity, they were told by their priest, who served as a mediator between the deity and the people, that they should annually sacrifice a member of

the royal household. This message brought great distress upon the people's leadership and was appealed. In a later message, the deity suggested that in place of the royal sacrifice, they should capture a wild cat and behead it in the presence of the god. The people complied and hunted down a wild cat. In the process, however, they lost a number of their young men. Thus they again appealed to the deity, and this time Penkyi Otu agreed to accept a mature bush buck (of a local species of deer).

To this day, in the annual deer hunting festival held each May, the people keep this story alive and repeat it to the young people as they sit around the fires at night and sing about it in their songs. The Aboakyer Festival is a major annual celebration in Ghana.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Acorn Feast; First Salmon Rites.

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Acorn Feast

The Hupa people reside in the Hupa Valley in Northern California, through which the Trinity River flows prior to its junction with the Klamath River. The United States designated their land a reservation in 1864. By the end of the century, there were fewer than 500 residents. The Hupa had two main ceremonies each year, the First Salmon Rite in the spring and the Acorn feast in the fall, both foods being major components in their diet. The Acorn feast gained added significance as being one of the few ceremonies among Native Americans of the Northwest that were overseen and led by women.

The Acorn feast would begin as the nuts began to drop from the local oak trees each fall. A female officiant would gather the first acorns to reach the ground, cook them, and prepare them with appropriate prayers and ritual actions. When the ritual was completed, the acorns would be offered to the group for consumption.

The ritual appears to have been abandoned through much of the 20th century, as the Hupa people adopted Christianity and acorn flour became less important in their diet; but in 1989, for the first time in more than 50 years, it was again revived. It is now seen as part of their cultural heritage.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aboakyer Festival; First Salmon Rites.

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Adalbert of Prague, Saint's Day of St. (April 23)

Adalbert of Prague (c. 956–997), a martyr from the era prior to the establishment of Christian dominance of eastern Europe, was born into a Czech noble family. He received a good education, including a decade under an outstanding scholar of his day, Archbishop Adalbert of Magdeburg (d. 981 CE). When his teacher died, the student took his mentor's name.

The young Adalbert returned home, was ordained, and, in 892, was named bishop of Prague. He left his life of relative wealth and lived an austere existence, which provided the base from which he could call for reform and the discontinuance of pre-Christian practices, including polygamy and slavery. After seven years, he resigned his post and went to Rome to live as a hermit. His rest was short, however, as in 993, Pope John XV (r. 985–996) called him from his retirement and sent him back to Prague to resume his episcopal office. Upon his return, he became involved with the quarrels among the royal families, which in 995 led to most of his brothers being killed. He publicly condemned those who killed his family members and was forced to flee to Hungary. While there, he baptized Geza, the grand prince who ruled the Hungarians, and his son Stephen. Geza would begin the process of Christianizing Hungary, which Stephen would largely complete and in the process be recognized as a saint himself.

Adalbert subsequently went to Poland, where the king provided him resources for his next mission, to convert neighboring Prussia. Near Gdansk, he ran into a problem. Following a common practice of Christian missionaries, he chopped down a couple of oak trees. Many Pagans believed the trees to house spirits who should not be angered. Christians cut the trees in a demonstration of the powerlessness of such imagined spirits. In this case, it was not the spirits to be feared, but the believers, who had Adalbert arrested, and in April 997, he was executed for his crime.

To the Pagans, he was just a criminal. To the Christian king who had sponsored his mission, he was a saintly martyr. The king paid a high price to recover Adalbert's body.

Adalbert's body, minus its head, was placed in the church at Gniezno. He was quickly considered and named a saint. A generation later, some nobles from Bohemia came to Gniezno and stole a body, which they believed to be Adalbert's. The Poles later said that they took the wrong body. They also claimed that in 1128, they recovered Adalbert's head and reunited it with the rest of his relics. Today, both cathedrals at Prague and Gniezno have a shrine that they claim holds Adalbert's bones. The Gniezno cathedral has another unique feature, large doors with reliefs that tell the story of Adalbert's life.

In April 1997, the 1,000th anniversary of Saint Adalbert's martyrdom was widely commemorated in the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, and Russia. In the midst of the celebrations, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) led a worship service at Gneizno attended by a number of heads of state and an estimated million believers.

Adalbert has been named a patron saint of Poland, Hungary, Bohemia (the Czech Republic), and Prussia.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Saint Stephen's Day (Hungary).

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Adi Da Samrajashram, Anniversary of Adi Da's First Footstep on (October 17)

Adidam is a spiritual community founded by Adavita Vedanta teacher Franklin Jones (1939–2008), better known by his religious name Avatar Adi Da Samraj, believed by his followers to have been a fully enlightened guru (teacher). Each year in October, they begin a three-month period punctuated by the commemoration of the most significant events in a three-month holiday cycle that begins with the celebration of Adi Da's receiving citizenship from Fiji on October 23. In 1983, Adi Da moved to Fiji. This was the outgrowth of a decision he had made a few years earlier to change his method of teaching his disciples. He had announced his role as human incarnation of the Invisible Divine. He subsequently initiated a small group of his devotees into an esoteric order and announced that he would begin to work these few for the sake of all. He also began an intense search for a Hermitage. That search led him first to Hawaii and then in 1983 to Fiji. For six months they wandered the Fijian Islands, when news came that a patron-devotee had purchased the Fijian island of Naitauba. Adi Da and his entourage landed at the island on October 27, 1983.

He had found his Hermitage and the place where he would do most of his spiritual work for the rest of his life. He saw it as a sacred place that would also have particular salvic import for humanity. He would also apply for and receive citizenship from the nation of Fiji.

His landing and taking his first step on Naitauba is now seen by his disciples as one of the more important moments of his human life. October 27 is a day for reflection on the meaning of the Hermitage and his movement to Fiji. Two additional important events would happen in Fiji now remembered as the Day of

Adi Da' Avataric Divine Self-Emergence and the day of the Native Establishment Beyond East and West.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Avataric Divine Self-Emergence, Day of; Native Establishment beyond East and West.

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Advent

The beginning of the Christian Liturgical Year in Western churches, Advent marks the four Sundays before Christmas. The word "advent" comes from the Latin "adventus," which means "coming." This season just before Christmas is associated with the "coming" of Jesus as Messiah and marks a time of penitence, preparation, and anticipation.

Advent always contains four Sundays, beginning on the Sunday nearest to November 30 (the feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle). Consequently, Advent may begin as early as November 27, but always ends on December 24. If Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, the last Sunday of Advent falls on that day, as Christmas Eve begins at sundown.

We do not know when the celebration of Advent was first introduced into the Church, but the first clear reference of its celebration comes in the sixth century. Prior to this time, we find references in the church fathers about homilies, celebrations, and fasts resembling our current Advent season.

Increasingly, in addition to the element of suffering recognized in Advent observances, the season is marked by a spirit of expectation and anticipation. The faithful express a yearning for deliverance by God from the evils of the world following the pattern of Israelite slaves in Egypt. Part of the expectation anticipates a judgment on sin and a calling of the world to accountability before God.



A boy lights candles during the fourth week of Advent. The traditional Advent wreath has three purple candles and one pink candle to represent the suffering and birth of Christ. (iStockPhoto)

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have set liturgies for Advent emphasizing these themes. Although less scripted, most other denominations have Advent practices that incorporate similar motifs. The traditional color of Advent is purple, the color of penitence. Purple also symbolizes royalty and is associated with the Advent of the King. As well, the purple of Advent is also the color of suffering used during Lent and Holy Week, connecting Jesus's birth and death.

A wreath of evergreens serving as a stand for five candles is used in most Advent celebrations. Evergreens remind us of eternal life, embodied in Jesus, the Light of the world coming into the darkness. The circle signifies God's eternity and endless mercy. Candles mark the light of God coming into the world. The circle usually contains three purple candles and a fourth pink candle, which is lit on the third

Sunday of Advent to signify the joy of anticipation for Christ's imminent birth.

While themes vary from church to church and year to year, the first candle is traditionally the candle of Expectation or Hope. The remaining three candles may be organized around characters or themes as a way to unfold the story and direct attention to the celebrations and worship in the season. So, for example, the sequence for the remaining three Sundays might be Bethlehem, Shepherds, and Angels; or Love, Joy, and Peace; or John the Baptist, Mary, and the Magi. The center white candle is the Christ Candle, signifying his incarnation as the heart of the season. It is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve.

Spreading through North America (from Germany) in the late 20th century was the custom of the Advent calendar. Given to children, the card contains 25 flaps, one of which is opened daily from December 1 to Christmas Day. In the more elaborate versions, the opening of the flap reveals a small gift or piece of candy.

Kevin Quast

See also Christmas; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Epiphany; Giant Lantern Festival; Lent; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Mary—Liturgical

Year of the Blessed Virgin; Misa de Gallo; Posadas, Las; Up Helly Aa; Winter Solstice.

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African Methodist Quarterly Meeting Day (August)

Wilmington, Delaware, is the home of one of the most unique gatherings of African Americans that date to the early 19th century. The Big August African Methodist Quarterly Meeting day celebrates the establishment of the African Union Methodist Protestant Church, founded in 1813 as the African Union Church, the first independent African American denominations.

African Americans had been present at the founding of what is now Asbury United Methodist Church, the first Methodist congregation in the city, but in 1805, a set of disagreements between the white and black members led to the founding of the Ezion Methodist Church by the black members. Eight years later, that congregation split over continuing its relationship to the larger, white-controlled Methodist Episcopal Church. Peter Spencer emerged as the leader of the separatist group. He led a group out of Ezion to found the independent African Union Church, which subsequently emerged as a new denomination with congregations throughout the Northeast.

The new church continued the practice of having quarterly church meetings—a time to conduct business, receive reports, and have a sacramental service and testimony meeting (which Methodists called a love feast). The quarterly meeting held in August began to grow in importance as other congregations of the African Union were founded. It turned into a weekend-long event modeled on camp meetings, but one led by Africans for Africans. Held after the planting season and before the harvest, it was open to both free blacks and slaves. After the Civil War, it continued as a religious gathering, but increasingly took on the characteristics of a general fair and celebration for African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic states.

In recent years, the African Union Methodist Protestant Church has failed to maintain a level of growth equal to either the black church or the black community in general, and the Quarterly Meeting has become a one-day event in August but survives as the oldest such event for African Americans. Although it no longer draws the crowds it did a generation ago, the Big August Quarterly has experienced a resurgence in recent years even as it has become independent of its roots.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aldersgate Day.

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Agnes, Feast Day of St. (January 21)

Agnes (d. c. 303) is one of several young female Christians who suffered martyrdom during the wave of persecutions during the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian (284–



Image of Saint Agnes by Andrea del Sarto as depicted in *Sacred and Legendary Art* by Anna Jameson, published in 1848. (Jameson, Anna, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 1848)

305). Though little is known of her life, she refused to marry, choosing to remain a virgin and live her earthly life as a bride of Christ. Her death in Rome was one among many that made a significant impression on the general public. She was but 12 years old when killed. A variety of stories subsequently grew up around the event. When her parents visited her tomb, for example, it was said that they had an apparition of a group of young virgins, including their daughter clad in rich vestments accompanied by a lamb.

Following her death, her body was retrieved and buried in a cemetery a short distance outside of what was then Rome's city limits. A small chapel was erected over her grave. Diocletian died in 305 CE, and a decade later, Christianity was decriminalized and began its rise to become the privileged religion by the end of Constantine's rule.

Among the miracle stories attributed to Agnes was one concerning Constantine's eldest daughter. Afflicted with leprosy, she prayed at Agnes's tomb and was reputedly healed.

Over the centuries, Agnes's shrine would be enlarged and finally emerge as the Basilica of Saint Agnes Outside the Walls. It remains home to the relics of Saint Agnes, which reside in a silver sarcophagus beneath the altar. Agnes came to be regarded as the patron saint of young women with a special role as their protector of bodily purity. She is usually pictured as a young woman holding a lamb with either a palm leaf or a sword in the other hand. She is also identified with white (for purity) roses.

Over the centuries, Agnes became associated with various practices by which on the Eve of Saint Agnes, young girls would attempt to divine the identity of their future husbands. After following these practices, they would go to sleep and see their mate in a dream. As John Keats wrote in his famous poem, "The Eve of Saint Agnes":

They told her how, upon St Agnes' Eve,
Young virgins might have visions of delight,
And soft adorings from their loves receive
Upon the honey'd middle of the night,
If ceremonies due they did aright;
As, supperless to bed they must retire,
And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire. (<http://englishhistory.net/keats/poetry/eveofstagnes.html>)

The Basilica of Saint Agnes is the site of a unique celebration annually on the Feast of Saint Agnes. The nearby Trappist monastery selects two lambs, which become the center of an elaborate blessing ceremony. They are then taken for a brief audience with the pope and, at the end of the day, are given to the care of the Benedictine nuns of the church dedicated to the martyr Santa Cecilia in Rome. The nuns will care for the lambs during the next months, until Maundy Thursday during Holy Week. The lambs are at that point sheared of their wool. Their job now done, their wool is used to make a particular ecclesiastical item called a pallium. A pallium fits around the neck of the wearer, and only the pope and archbishops (and on rare occasion, a bishop) are allowed to wear them. They are a sign of episcopal authority, and until he receives his pallium from the pope, an archbishop cannot exercise jurisdiction over his assigned territory. Should he move from one archdiocese to another, he must receive a new pallium. The wool of the Saint Agnes lambs will make a dozen pallia each year.

Once woven, the new pallia are placed in Saint Peter's Basilica on June 28, the eve of the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, when an all-night vigil is kept. They are placed on an altar near the tomb of Saint Peter; thus the pallium come to represent

the strength associated with Peter and the virginal meekness of Agnes. After the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the pallia are stored in Saint Peter's until needed.

J. Gordon Melton

See also George, Feast Day of St.; Lucy, Saint's Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Agua, La Fiesta de (October)

In the mountains of the Peruvian Andes, the traditional religion of the indigenous people continues to be practiced alongside the Christianity taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The primary deities of the ancient faith are Inti, the sun god, also known as the patron deity of the former Inca Empire, and Pachamama, the mother of the world. The Incas considered Pachamama as a fertility goddess and thus is related to both planting and harvesting. She also caused earthquakes. In popular thought, she is often interchangeable with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Pachamama has a special place in the village of San Pedro de Casta. Each October, she becomes the focus of the local Fiesta de Agua (Festival of Water). Preparation for the fiesta is accomplished by the cleaning and repairing of the irrigation ditches that connect the fields with the nearby Carhuayumac River. Then, on the first Sunday in October, after the invocation to Pachamama to flood the growing area with water, the gate at the river's edge is opened and water begins to flow anew to the fields. A group of horsemen lead the water as it begins its journey from the river.

Though isolated, some 80 miles from Lima, the festive occasion attracts a large number of visitors. The arrival of the water at its destination is the occasion for a village-wide party with fresh foods and ample liquid refreshments, music, and dancing for the rest of the day. It is notable as an openly Pagan festival in an otherwise Catholic land.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guadalupe, Feast of Our Lady of; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin.

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Ahoi Ashtami

Ahoi or Hoi Mata (known as Sanjhi in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) is a Hindu goddess whose domain is the family. She is seen as an aspect of the female Shakti energy and primarily worshipped by females. She most often appears on the walls of rural homes where her image will be painted during different festivals.

Across northern India, women will worship her primarily on Hoi Ashtami, during the month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar). On Ahoi Ashtami, mothers who have sons will keep fast on this day and pray for their long life.

A story is told of a mother of seven sons who went to the forest to bring soil for the renovation of her home. In the process, she dropped her axe and hurt a lion cub. The cub was killed, and even as she felt the guilt of the accident, she continued in her task of gathering soil. Over the next year, her seven sons died, and she came to believe that it was because of the death of the cub. She finally confessed what had happen to a neighbor, who informed her that by confessing her act, she had almost negated the effect of it. The neighbor suggested that she also pray to the goddess Ahoi Mata. Following the suggestion, the woman fasted on the ashtami (eighth day) of the waxing moon in the month of Kartika, and eventually her seven sons were returned to her.

Women observing Ahoi Ashtami rise before sunrise and first go to the local temple for prayers. She will then fast all day until the Moon appears. During the day, she will place a bowl of water before the picture of Ahoi Mata. She wraps a red thread around the bowl and smears the edges. Women will gather and an elderly lady will read out the story of Ahoi Mata to those assembled.

Offerings are made to the goddess—money, some sweets—and later in the day, the offering will be given to the children or the elderly.

Constance A. Jones

See also Navaratri; Onam; Teej Festivals.

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Airing the Classics

Also known as the Double Sixth, because it occurs on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, Airing the Classics is a minor Buddhist observance adhered to in some Buddhist centers in China. It is based on a disaster that overtook a shipment

of Buddhist scriptures on their journey from India to China. The boat carrying the texts was overturned, and all the books had to be spread out to dry.

Through the centuries, it became the practice on this day (which is in the middle of summer) for monasteries to remove their library books from the shelves and examine them for any mold or insect damage. This practice has been largely neglected in the modern world of air conditioning and humidity control.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival.

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Aizen Summer Festival (June 30–July 2)

The Aizen Summer Festival is one of three summer celebrations based in Osaka, Japan, unique for being held at a Buddhist temple. Its role in the festival survived through the Meiji Restoration and the subsequent privileging of Shinto over Buddhism as this temple dates to the sixth century. It was a gift to Osaka by the pioneering Japanese Buddhist Prince Shotoku (a.k.a. Shotokutaishi, 574–622). The festival originated in the 18th century.

The Aizen Temple was a public clinic for the poor, one of four such temples built by Shotoku. Its monks grew plants, which were then used as medicinal aids for the poor. Shotoku also installed a statue of Queen Srimala (Queen Shoman), an Indian queen mentioned in the *Srimaladevi Sutra*, also known in English as *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*. Later, Aizen-Myoo, the god of good match-making and happy marriages, was also installed. Thus the temple became known as Shoman-in Aizen-do. Rites for the summer fest are led by a group of priests led by the chief priests of Shitennoji at Taho Pagoda (a nearby temple in Osaka).

Women have a key role in the festival. At the same time, many females coming to the event wear yukatas, the light summer kimonas that have again become popular in Japan as street wear. As the three-day festival starts, a group of Aizen girls wearing a yukata designed for the festival moves between the temple and the local train station shouting out a chant about the coming event. The festival includes a parade in which local girls play the role of geisha girls in their kimonas coming for worship at the temple. They arrive on elaborately decorated palanquins. Among the yukata-wearing women accompanying the palanquins are a contingent from the Osaka Yuhigaoka Gakuen Fashion Department.

Meanwhile, at the temple, the women will organize what is known as the “palanquin shake,” held in front of Taho Pagoda. Twelve Aizen girls on the palanquins

are raised above the crowd to their delight and shaken, their back-and-forth movement being said to ward off the evil. In the crowd are many people from the local dyeing and apparel industry who come to pray to Aizen-Myoo. “Aizen” in Japanese means indigo dye.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Chichibu Yomatsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; New Year’s Day; Sakura Matsuri; Tenjin Matsuri.

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Aki Matsuri (October)

Aki Matsuri is a traditional Shinto festival that has become a secularized Japanese national celebration analogous to Thanksgiving Day in the United States. It was traditionally a day built around the local Shinto shrines, in which the shrines’ portable shrine was processed around the village, and people use the occasion to thank the divine forces (*kami*) for the abundance of the harvest. As those who carried the shrine visited each house, they delivered wishes for happiness to those who dwelt there. The day begins with the purification of the shrine by the priest and the dressing in traditional clothes by the participants.

There is not one autumn festival in Japan (and the Japanese diaspora), but a variety of local festivals held at different sites with different local emphases and on different dates throughout the month. Local dates are often adjusted from year to year to hold the festival on a weekend. In Kyoto, the Aki Matsuri includes a celebration of the founding of the city (October 22). Among the larger of the festivals are those held at Akita, Aichi, and Nihonmatsu. At these locations, the procession to the local Shinto shrine is held at night and includes hundreds of lanterns that wind through the street accompanied by music.

Hachiman, a popular deity in Japan who is seen as both the Shinto god of war and the country’s divine protector as well as a Buddhist bodhisattva, is the focus of a number of autumn festivals, including the ones at Himeji in Hyogo prefecture and Takayama in Gifu prefecture. The later begins with a ceremony at the Sakurayama Hachimangu Shrine, followed by a procession of 11 portable shrines (called *mikoshi*) that are taken through the town to allow Hachiman to visit the homes in each neighborhood. In the evening, the shrines are on display and may be viewed by the light of numerous paper lanterns.

Nagasaki is also home to one of the larger autumn festivals, the Nagasaki Kunchi, that originated in the 17th century.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Chichibu Yomatsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Nagasaki Kunchi; Natsu Matsuri; New Year's Day; Sakura Matsuri.

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Akshay Tritiiya

Akshay Tritiiya, also known as Parashurama Jayanti, the appearance day of Lord Parashurama, is a Vaishnava Hindu holiday that has gathered numerous meanings as it has been associated with diverse events from Hindu mythology. It is celebrated on the third day of the waxing moon of the Hindu month of Vaishakh (May on the Common Era calendar). Among its important commemorations, it is believed to be the day that the legendary sage Veda Vyasa, considered the author of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, began to dictate the book to the elephant-headed deity Ganesh. Many Vaishnava Hindus consider Veda Vyasa as an avatar (incarnated form) of the deity Vishnu. Ganesh appears in most Hindu temples as the god who removes obstacles.

Primarily, however, Akshay Tritiiya is also considered to be the birthday of Parashurama, the sixth incarnation of the god Vishnu. Parashurama was a famous warrior, and most of his adventures involved fighting. Among his battles was his opposition to the advancing ocean, his blocking of which saved the lands of Konkan and Malabar. The most prominent temples to Parashurama are found along the western coast of India from Gujarat to Kerala, including the ones at Shivpuri-Akkalkot, Khopoli (Maharashtra), and Fort Songadh (Gujarat).

In northern India, Akshay Tritiiya is referred to as the day the river Ganges, the most holy in India, is supposed to have descended to the earth from the heavens. Thus it is an auspicious day to take a bath in the river.

Akshay Tritiiya is generally observed with fasting and the performance of pujas (worship). According to the Vedic scriptures, knowledge gained and/or charity

done on this day will be most fruitful. Many think of it as a lucky day for the starting of a new business, or a new venture in life such as a marriage. Many people will delay purchases until this day because of its lucky associations. The day is also celebrated in Bengal, where Ganesh and the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, are the special objects of attention. Some say that even Kubera, the treasurer of the gods and the richest of deities, will pray to Lakshmi on this day. Attention to Kubera and Lakshmi is directed through a lengthy *Kubera Lakshmi Puja* before an image of Lakshmi and the Sudarsana Kubera Yantra, an image symbolic of Kubera.

Constance A. Jones

See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain).

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Akshay Tritiya (Jain)

Akshay Tritiya is a Hindu holy day that falls during the waxing moon of the month of Vaishakh. For Hindus, it is a day of both festivities and fasting. The word “akshay” means un-decaying, and it refers to the belief that the benefits from the devotion and piety exhibited on this day will never dissolve away.

Akshay Tritiya, also known as Varshi Tapa, is also a holy day for Jains. As with most Jain holy days, it is a time for fasting. A primary focus for celebration on this day is the Gujarati sacred site Shatrunjay, near the city of Palitana, Gujarat. There are hundreds of Jain temples in the immediate area, the most sacred of which is on the top of the hill that is dedicated to the first Tirthankar, Lord Adinath (a.k.a. Rishabhdeva). Rishabhdeva is said to have completed a continuous fast of 13 months and 13 days on Akshay Tritiya.

Jains believe that in the legendary past, a Jain monk and his disciple, both of whom could fly and knew the secrets of creating gold, founded this holy site having been attracted by its twin peaks, both rising 2,000 feet above sea level. Over the years, numerous saints and teachers have chosen to conclude their earthly life (attain nirvana), including the first Tirthankar, who also was named the patron saint of Palitana.

Pilgrims on Akshay Tritiya will complete their fast by sipping sugar-cane juice in the cool shadow of the mountain. Some believe that in the future, a massive

deluge will occur on earth that will destroy everything except the holy community on top of the Shatrunjay hills.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana.

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Aldersgate Day

Possibly the most famous words ever penned by John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of the Methodist movement, were recorded in his journal for May 24, 1738. A priest in the Church of England, he had been raised in a Christian home and had followed his father and older brother into the priesthood. However, there



Methodist leader John Wesley (1703–1791). (Hayward Cirker and Blanche Cirker, eds., *Dictionary of American Portraits* [New York: Dover Publications, 1967].)

was something lacking in his Christian experience, and one evening, he went to a lay-led religious gathering in London. He found the program to center on a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. "About a quarter before nine," Wesley later recounted, "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Often confused with a conversion experience, Wesley, already a Christian, had in fact experienced an enlightenment that gave him confidence and a sense of assurance of his salvation. The movement he founded would preach that all believers could share that same sense of confidence, a belief embodied

in a popular hymn written by the blind Methodist songwriter Fannie J. Crosby that harks back to Wesley's account.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
 Oh what a foretaste of glory divine!
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
 Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
 (*The Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville et al. The Methodist
 Publishing House, 1939, 238)

Through the years since Wesley's death, Methodists have recognized May 24 as the day Wesley experienced the assurance of his salvation. In the last generation, American Methodists have collapsed Aldersgate Day into a more general reflection on the history of the Methodist movement. In 2004, the General Conference, the highest legislative body in the United Methodist Church, also designated May 24 as Heritage Day and encouraged Methodists to celebrate the Sunday prior to May 24 as either Heritage Day, Aldersgate Sunday, or a combination thereof.

The celebration of Aldersgate Sunday is encouraged but not mandated by the church, and local congregations may or may not commemorate it from one year to the next. Aldersgate Day/Sunday is also celebrated by Methodists in England where Wesley lived most of his life.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Reformation Sunday.

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Ali ibn Abi Talib, Commemoration Days for

Ali ibn Abi Talib (c. 597–661), the son-in-law of Muhammad and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community, would be designated the first Imam in the lineage of leaders of the Shi'a Muslim community. Ali's career was somewhat suppressed after his father-in-law died. Though married to Muhammad's daughter Fatima, he was passed over as the successor to lead the young community. He dutifully recognized the first three caliphs—Abu Bakr (d. 634), Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644), and Uthman ibn Affan (d. 656)—and finally was elected the fourth

caliph, but only after Uthman's murder. Ali was, in turn, assassinated in 661 after what proved a tumultuous reign.

Ali's demonstrated courage in the midst of the battle at Badr (624) had won him many supporters, and later contributed to his hero-like status among the Shi'as. The Shi'a leadership concluded that he was the rightful successor to Muhammad, that he had been appointed by the Prophet, and that Ali's commission was carried by his descendants. Angry at Ali's murder, they became even more defiant enemies of the Sunni Muslims after the massacre of Ali's son al-Husayn along with his companions at the Battle of Karbala (680).

As the Shi'a Muslims established themselves in what is now Iraq, they turned Ali's shrine into a pilgrimage site. Today they celebrate his birthday (on the 13th day of the Muslim month of Rajab); the anniversary of his appointment by Muhammad to lead the Muslim community (the feast of Ghadir Khumm on the 18th day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah); and his death (on the 21st day of the month of Ramadan). During these days, Shi'a Muslims will gather at the mosque and have a variety of activities that might include a communal feast, a program concerning the life of Imam Ali, reading from the Qur'an, and a time for prayer.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holidays; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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All Saints Day (November 1)

In 835, Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–844) set November 1 as a day to honor all the saints (at a time where most people acknowledged as saints were martyrs). Among the more magnificent architectural wonders in Rome at the time was the former Pantheon, which had been transformed into a church honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the martyr saints. At the time of the consecration by Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–614) on May 13 (in either 610 or 611), All Saints Day was placed on the church's calendar on a day that had been a popular holiday in Pagan Rome, May 13 being the culmination of the ancient feast of Lemuria in which Romans would ritually seek to drive the malevolent spirits of the dead from their homes and lives.

It was also evident to any student of the church's history that most of the martyrs remained nameless, even as the church had risen to a place of prominence and leadership on their blood. What is not evident is, as he consecrated a chapel in the Basilica of Saint Peter to all the saints, how much Gregory was aware of the fact that some in the Pagan lands to the north saw November 1—and more so, the evening that introduced it—as a time of the dead and communication with them.

As the veneration of saints and the theological speculation on purgatory as a place of intermediate suffering of the deceased who are not yet purified and sanctified to a point that they can reach heaven rose, All Saints Day took on an increasing importance as a memorial to all the saintly persons who had not found a place on the church's calendar. The church came to believe that the saints represented a storehouse of grace that became available to the average believer as the church opened it to them, and that such grace could be used to free suffering souls from purgatory. (It was the observation that the church's use of this belief in purgatory for the selling of indulgences to free the deceased from suffering had been corrupted that became the initial issue leading to the Protestant Reformation.)

For Catholics, All Saints Day is a day of obligation, meaning that the faithful should attend a Mass and refrain from activities that distract from the atmosphere of worship. After the Reformation, Anglicans and Lutherans continued to observe All Saints Day, but it was discarded by the churches in the Reformed church tradition such as the Presbyterians. It has regained some prominence in the atmosphere of the 20th-century ecumenical movements, but is often shifted to the Sunday nearest to November 1. It competes with Halloween, a secularized holiday that emerged at the end of the century as one of the most celebrated in the United States, from where its popularity has been exported to many parts of the world.

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Souls Day; Halloween; Saints, Celebrating the Lives of (Protestant Tradition); Saints, Veneration of (Roman Catholic Tradition); Samhain.

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All Souls Day (November 2)

All Souls Day is a primarily Western Christian day of remembrance of all people who have died in the faith. It is primarily observed by Roman Catholics but is carried on the liturgical calendar by Anglicans and a few other Protestant groups, though its meaning radically changes in those cases. Anglicans and Lutherans generally call it the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed.



A Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*) festival participant wears traditional face paint during a celebration in Hollywood, California, November 8, 2009. (Zepherwind/Dreamstime)

Roman Catholic perspectives on the day are somewhat tied to their peculiar understanding of the afterlife. It is believed that most Christians upon death move on to a place/state called purgatory, in which they go through a further process of punishment and purification in order to attain the sanctified state that would allow them to enter heaven (the presence of God). It is generally felt that prayer and participation in the Eucharist by those still in this life may significantly assist them in completing their time in purgatory. While anyone may engage in those activities at any time, All Souls Day has been set aside especially to assist those in purgatory.

The practice seems to have arisen in the ninth century among some monastic orders, as they began to remember the deceased members of their communities. It later spread more generally.

Among the more interesting variations of the Catholic All Souls celebration is the Day of the Dead celebration (*Día de los Muertos*), held throughout Latin America and those of South and Central American heritage residing in North America. Believers create private altars honoring the deceased upon which one places a skull made of sugar, flowers (preferably marigolds), and an array of foods for the consumption of the deceased. The altar with the items on it is taken to the cemetery as gifts for those in the family who have died. As most North Americans do not celebrate All Souls Day, they frequently confuse the Day of the Dead with Halloween (October 31).

Protestants jettisoned belief in purgatory in the 16th century. For the few who retained All Souls Day on their calendar, it became a time to recall those whose memory was still alive in the life of the present community and to celebrate the

lives and faithfulness of the mass of church members. It was also a time for church members to remember those of their own family and friends who had died.

Most Protestants do not celebrate All Souls Day. Part of the rationale for dropping it has been their understanding of “saint” as a term to describe all church members, both those who have become exemplars of the faith and those less accomplished in demonstrating the Christian life. It is the Protestant belief that even the most saintly stand in need of God’s grace to sanctify them, and in and of themselves neither possess nor demonstrate any special merit.

Eastern Orthodox Christians also do not celebrate All Souls Day. Rather, at several points through the year, they have designated special days to remember the departed. These days usually occur on Saturday, in remembrance of Christ’s day in the tomb. The Saturdays immediately before the beginning of Lent and Pentecost are most notably used to remember the deceased.

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Saints Day; Halloween.

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Alphabet Day (May 24)

The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the Saint’s Day of Sts. Cyril and Methodius on May 11 of the old Julian calendar, which is May 24 on the new revised Julian calendar and the Common Era calendar. During 1991, Russia, which for over half a century repressed the Russian Orthodox Church, as the Soviet Union was being dissolved, designated May 24 as a joint holiday by the emerging Russian government and the revived Russian Orthodox Church. Officially the Day of Slavic Culture and Literature, it is popularly known as Alphabet Day and celebrates the establishment of the Cyrillic alphabet, named for Saint Cyril, as the official alphabet of the Russian language.

The rise of the Cyrillic alphabet was not immediate. Introduced into Bulgaria in the middle of the ninth century, it became important in the emergence of the Bulgarian nation and facilitated the development of Bulgarian literature and culture. Russia adopted Christianity officially as the state religion in 988. The development of both Christianity and Russian culture was slowed between the 12th and 14th centuries when Russia was dominated by the Tartars, who destroyed many of

the churches. The Tartars were finally turned back following the battle of Kulikov in 1380, and Bulgaria proved a major resource for rebuilding Russian orthodoxy. About this time, a variant of the Cyrillic alphabet call Abur or Old Permic was introduced into Russian by the missionary priest Stepan Khrap (1340–1396), now known as Saint Stephen of Perm. His alphabet was used until the 17th century, when Peter the Great (r. 1682–1725) mandated the use of the present Cyrillic alphabet. The work of Saint Stephen of Perm is remembered on April 26, which is both his saint's day and Old Permic Alphabet Day.

Following the proclamation of the Day of Slavic Culture and Literature in 1991, little was done in the way of celebration. The Russian Orthodox Church was still relatively weak, many in government were still atheists, and the day conflicted with the end of the university year. However, toward the end of the first decade of the new century, government attitudes toward the revived Orthodox Church mellowed. In 2010, the patriarch of the Russian church invited the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I to join in the celebrations with the backing of the government. They were held at the recently dedicated Cathedral of Christ the Savior (the largest Orthodox church in the world). The 2010 celebration signaled a new level of church-state cooperation in Russia.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts.; National Day.

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Alphonse de Ligouri, Saint's Day of St. (August 1)

Alphonse de Ligouri (1696–1787) was the founder of the Redemptorist order and one of the most influential moral theologians in Roman Catholic history. He was born into a noble family in Naples, received a good education in law (receiving his degree at the age of 16), and practiced for several years.

Upon losing a suit against the Grand Duke of Tuscany involving a large sum, Alphonse became disenchanted, withdrew, and started living an abstemious, religious life. Influenced of Bishop Tommaso Falcoia (1663–1743), he became committed to the religious life and founded the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer, an order that received both men and women as members. The order focused on work among the poor, and it was approved by Pope Benedict XIV (r. 1740–1758) in 1749–1750.

Alphonse's talents were recognized in 1862 when he was named bishop of Saint Agatha of the Goths, a position he held until his retirement in 1775.

Alphonse deviated from the flamboyant preaching that dominated his era and chose a style that he saw as speaking more directly from the heart. He also opposed the rigorist, puritanical moral teachings of the Jansenists, offering instead a morality of the heart, which he published in his two-volume *Theologia Moralis* (1753, 1755). His approach is termed "equiprobism," in which he sought a middle way between moral rigorism and laxity.

Alphonse may be more remembered for his spiritual devotional writings which remain in print to the present and have been translated into a number of languages, such as *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin* (1745), *Novena of the Heart of Jesus* (1758), *The Means of Prayer* (1759), and *The Way of Salvation* (1767). He stressed God's mercy and desire for repentance over any exercise of His wrath. His approach also led to his assuming a role in the revival of veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He authored several Marian classics, including *The Glories of Mary*, *Marian Devotion*, and *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*.

He was beatified in 1816 and was canonized in 1839. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1871.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Amalaka Ekadashi

Amalaka Ekadashi is the Vaishnava Hindu fast on the 11th day of the waxing moon in the lunar month of Phaguna. On this occasion, the celebration is combined with the veneration of trees, a derivation of the belief that on this day, Hari (Lord Vishnu) dwells near the amalaka tree. The amalaka or Indian gooseberry tree (*Phyllanthus emblica*) is a tree well known for its medicinal properties. All parts of the plant, but especially its fruit, are used in Indian/Ayurvedic medicine. It has been a major source of vitamin C.

As on all ekadashi days, a fast is observed on this day, and the priests at the temples are given gifts. Worship is, however, directed toward the tree. Following ablutions in the morning hours, the priests ceremonially bathe and water the tree and then lead a puja designed for the occasion.

Constance A. Jones

See also Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Mokshada Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

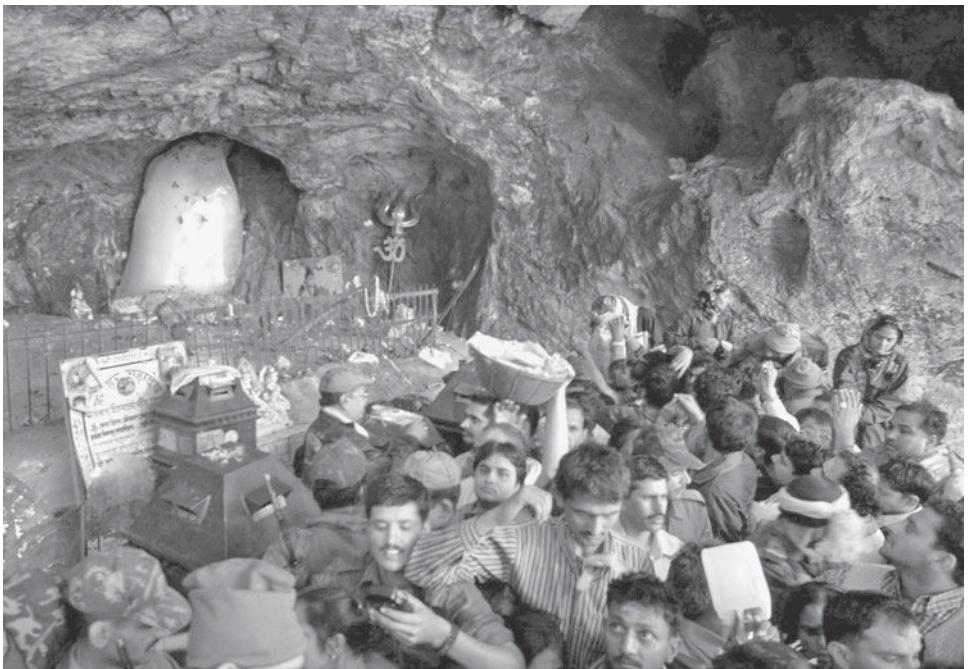
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Amarnath Yatra

Amarnath is a shrine to the Hindu deity Shiva, located in a cave in the Indian state of Kashmir on the side of a mountain roughly 7,500 feet in elevation. The remote site is some 80 miles from Shrinagar, the Kashmir capital, and takes some effort to visit, but within the cave is a Shiva lingam-shaped piece of ice-covered snow that



Pilgrims pray at the stalagmite at Amarnath cave, a shrine to the Hindu god Shiva. (AP/Wide World Photos)

is visible at the far end of the cave. This structure is considered a “self-generated” Shiva Lingum, created by nature rather than human hands. By its side are two additional ice lingams, that of Parvati and of their son Ganesh.

According to stories told of the cave, it is here that Shiva revealed the secret of immortality to his spouse Parvati. She had been persistent in her demands to know it, and Shiva chose the remote cave to ensure that no human heard it. As he traveled to the cave, he abandoned Nandi (the bull upon which he rode) at Pahalgam, left Ganesh at what is now Mahaganesh Hill, and deposited the five elements at Panjtarni. Once in the cave, he ordered Rudra to spread fire that would eliminate every living thing in and around the cave. All life was destroyed except a pigeon egg. During his narration of the secret, the pigeon egg, which had remained safe from the fire because it was beneath the deerskin on which Shiva sat, heard Shiva’s talk to Parvati. The two pigeons born from this egg became immortal, and pilgrims to the cave often spot the immortal pigeons incubated by the Lord Shiva himself.

It is said that at a later date, a Muslim shepherd named Buta Malik received a sack of coal from a holy man at this site. When he arrived home, he discovered that the coal was now gold. Simultaneously, the icy Shiva Linga appeared in the famous cave.

The principal pilgrimage to this shrine is in the full moon of Shravana (July–August). The full pilgrimage, a widely observed custom since 1850 CE, takes a total of 40 days from the lowlands upward and back. Many local residents had operated informally to assist pilgrims when, in 1996, a number of pilgrims died in an accident during their trek. This incident led to the formation of what is now the Bhole Bhandari Charitable Trust, a nonprofit trust that works with the local government in setting the most auspicious date for the annual pilgrimage and assisting those who make it for the first time.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ashokashtami.

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Ambuvachi

Ambuvachi, a celebration of the Mother Goddess Devi, is a rite observed in most of north and central India, but most elaborately in Bengal. During four days in the Hindu month of Ashadha (June–July on the Common Era calendar), just before the Indian rainy season begins, the earth goddess (Devi) is said to menstruate in order to prepare herself for being fertile. During this period, all plowing, sowing, and farm work is

suspended, as the Devi Bhagavatam notes, “If anyone digs ground on the day of Ambuvâchî, one remains in hell for four Yugas.” Also, during these days, widows may be required to observe special taboos, as they are not involved in procreation.

Observance of Ambuvachi is focused on seven temples located across northern India (with one in what is now Pakistan), where body parts of Devi are believed to have fallen. For example, the Kamakhya Temple in Assam is, according to the Kalika Purana, believed to have been constructed on the site where her genitalia fell.

Constance A. Jones

See also Navaratri; Teej Festivals.

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Amitabha's Birthday

Amitabha (known in Japan as Amida), a Buddha who rules the spiritual realm known as Sukhavati, the Western Paradise or Pure Land. One of the most popular deity figures in Mahayana Buddhism, Amitabha shows up relatively late in Mahayana's development, the first mention being in the Sutra of the Buddha Amitabha. That sutra seems to have had a Sanskrit origin, but is known today only from its fifth-century Chinese version.

Like the average bodhisattva, Amitabha began life as a human. He is most often identified with Dharmakara, an Indian king who gave up his throne and became a monk. Instead of taking the bodhisattva vow, however, Dharmakara decided to become a Buddha. Following his instructions by the Buddha Lokeshvararaja, he made a set of 48 vows through which he laid plans to establish a realm where all souls may reside until they are ready to enter nirvana, in Buddhism the ultimate state of rest for enlightened beings. This realm, Sukhavati, is best understood as a state of consciousness, although in many people's minds, it is a kind of heavenly paradise. A practitioner need only recite Amitabha's name at the moment of death, and Amitabha will appear and escort that person to his Western Paradise.

Amitabha thus emerges as one of a small number of the deity figures in Buddhism recognized as a Buddha (as opposed to a mere bodhisattva). A list of other Buddhas includes Maitreya, Baisajya-guru (Medicine Buddha), and of course, Gautama Buddha (the historical Buddha). The majority of the figures worshipped in Mahayana are bodhisattvas.

The practice of calling upon the name of Amitabha was developed as one practice within the T'ian Tai (Tendai in Japan) tradition and then became the central



A statue of Amitabha is placed on an altar decorated in honor of Amitabha's birthday in Macau.
(J. Gordon Melton)

practice that defined the Pure Land tradition as developed by Hui-yuan (334–416 CE) and Shan Dao (613–681) in China and Honen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1263) in Japan. In Pure Land settings, Amitabha is generally pictured in the center with the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara (a.k.a. Guan Yin) on his left and Mahasthamaprapta on his right. Avalokitesvara is often said to have been born as an emanation from Amitabha's brow. Occasionally, Avalokitesvara is depicted on Amitabha's forehead. The Giant Buddha at Kamakura, so often pictured as a symbol of Japan, is a statue of Amitabha (or Amida).

Belief in Amitabha's Western Paradise has been a powerful force of popular belief, and has turned Pure Land Buddhism into the largest of the Mahayana traditions. Entry into the Western Paradise provides the practitioner a shortcut on the road to nirvana. Instead of practicing, constant discipline, and looking forward to additional rebirths with more need for exhaustive cultivation, faith in Amitabha allows one to achieve a sort of salvation in this life. Entry into Sukhavati, although still no nirvana, would assure a person of ultimate enlightenment and entry into nirvana.

As a former human, it is appropriate to speak of Amitabha having a birthday. It is celebrated on the 17th day of the 11th month in the lunar calendar. Pure Land believers celebrate the day with gatherings at Buddhist temples, where they together recite the Amitabha Mantra (in Japan, the *Nimbutsu*).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guan Yin, Renunciation of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday; Samantabhadra's Birthday; Shinran Shonin, Birthday of.

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Anant Chaturdashi

Often seen in relation to the end of the celebration of Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Shiva known as Ganesh Chaturthi, as it is observed on the same day, Anant Chaturdashi is an observance relative to the deity Vishnu. On this day, Vaishnava Hindus will observe a dawn-to-dusk fast and worship Vishnu, who is pictured sleeping on his bed, with the serpent Adishesha or Anant, both floating on the ocean of milk. Many Hindus see this moment as an auspicious time to meditate upon Vishnu and to make a vow in his honor, which, if kept for the next 14 years, will bring wealth and prosperity.

A story, which Krishna relates in the *Mahabharata*, is told of this holiday. It concerns a Brahmin named Sumant, whose daughter Sushila encountered at the river's shore a group of women who were performing puja (worship). They informed Sushila that they were worshipping "Anant," Vishnu's serpent. They had prepared some special food and had constructed an image of Anant out of sacred grass, which was placed in a bamboo basket. After worshipping Anant, they took a silk string with 14 knots in it and tied it to their left wrist. (Males making the vow would tie it to their right wrist.) The vow entails continuing to wear the string for the next 14 years, and it is done in order to bring divinity and wealth upon the wearer.

Sushila decided to take the Anant vow, and from that she and her husband began to prosper. Then, one day, her husband noticed the string that Sushila wore on her left hand. She recounted the steps she had taken to get it and the apparent results. Her husband rejected her story, however, claiming that his wisdom and effort were the source of their wealth. After a heated argument, he tore the string off Sushila's hand and cast it into the fire. In the months that followed, the couple suffered a variety of misfortunes and fell into poverty.

Finally, Sushila's husband became convinced that she had been correct, and he began to make penance for his actions. He went into the forest in search of Anant and in the end had an encounter with Vishnu. He confessed his error, Vishnu forgave him, and Sushila's husband took the 14-year vow.

Anant Chaturdashi, the day when one originally makes the vow, is observed on the purnima or full moon of the Hindu month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar).

Constance A. Jones

See also Ganesh Chaturthi; Guru Purnima; Nagapanchami.

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Anapanasati Day

The *Anapanasati Sutta* is a key text of the Pali Canon, the oldest Buddhist holy books and the only ones recognized as authoritative by Theravada Buddhists, who dominate the Buddhist community across southern Asia from Sri Lanka to Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The sutta (or sutra) is a discourse attributed to the Buddha concerning meditation. It offers instruction on using the breath as a focus for what is termed mindfulness meditation and focuses on 16 objects on which one may meditate.

The sutta presents the teachings contained therein as the Buddha's teaching, which was directly based on his own experience using anapanasati in his achieving enlightenment. Anapanasati is ultimately the basis of most forms of Buddhist meditation practice. There is some room for differences in understanding the

sutta's teachings, hence the variant forms and emphases found in, for example, vipassana and Zen.

The sutta is introduced with the story of its origin. At an unknown point in his career, the Buddha was at Savatthi toward the end of the Vassa Retreat, the three-month retreat taken by Buddhist monks each year during the rainy season. Buddha lived much of his life at Savatthi, one of the larger cities in India at the time, and delivered the largest number of his discourses there, including the discourse on meditation. It was occasioned by one particularly productive Vassa Retreat, at the end of which the Buddha expressed his approval with the progress of the monks and encouraged them to continue in retreat for another month. That additional month ended on the full-moon day, and he marked the occasion by delivering the instructions now found in the *Anapanasati Sutta*, or the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing.

The contemporary celebration of Anapanasati Day commemorates the day that the Buddha delivered the *Anapanasati Sutta*. It is celebrated on the full moon a month after the end of the Vassa retreat (usually in November on the Common Era calendar).

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See also Abhidhamma Day; Asalha Puja Day; Vassa.

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Andrew, Saint's Day of St. (November 30)

Andrew, the brother of the Apostle Peter's brother, is introduced like his brother, both fishermen, at the point that Jesus calls them to join him.

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon who is now called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And straightway they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18–20)

The two brothers lived in Capernaum and were, according to the Gospel of John, originally followers of John the Baptist. John had pointed Jesus out to two of his disciples and described him as the Lamb of God. The two disciples followed Jesus and engaged him in conversation. One of the two was Andrew. Subsequently

He found first his own brother Simon, and said unto him, "We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ)." He brought him unto Jesus.

Jesus looked upon him, and said, "Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shall be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter)." (John 1:41–42)

He appears in passing several times through John's Gospel, but not much was revealed. His presence in the upper room with the other disciples in the period between Easter and Pentecost is noted, but then he drops out of the biblical record.

The historian Eusebius places Andrew in Asia Minor and in Scythia, north of the Black Sea. He may have ventured up the Volga River as far as Kiev. Tradition attributed the establishment of the See of Byzantium (later Constantinople) to him as early as 38 CE. He is said to have been martyred by crucifixion at Patras in Greece. He was also described as dying on an X-shaped cross, now known as Saint Andrew's cross, his executioner accommodating a request that he not die on a Latin cross, as he was unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. This tradition seems to be a later development, as the earlier texts picture him on a Latin cross.

From the traditional accounts of Andrew, Russia, Ukraine, and Romania claimed him as their patron saint. He is also claimed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which began as the Bishopric of Byzantium. His relation to Patras is more complicated. Reputedly, Andrew's relics were removed from Patras and carried to Constantinople. From that point, there are conflicting stories about their travels. One story suggests that in the eighth century, they were taken to Scotland, and now reside in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh. Residents of Amalfi, Italy, claim that the relics in Constantinople were captured when crusaders invaded Constantinople in 1208, were taken back to Italy, and now may be found in the cathedral at Amalfi. Finally, in 1461, partial relics of Andrew, including a portion of the skull, were given by the Thomas Palaeologus, who ruled an area of southern Greece that included Patras in the years immediately after Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Muslims, to Pope Pius II (r. 1458–1464). These relics, formally enshrined in Saint Peter's Basilica, were returned to Patras in September 1964 by Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978).

The feast day for Andrew, in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern churches, is November 30. A special service for the veneration of the relics of Saint Andrew is held in Patras annually on that day. It is a national holiday in Scotland, where the cross of Saint Andrew adorns the national flag and from which a number of other flags, such as those of Nova Scotia and Alabama, have been adapted.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bartholomew's Day, Saint; James the Greater, Feast Day of St.; John the Evangelist, Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Anna Koot. See Diwali; Govardhan Puja

Anne, Feast Day of St. (July 26)

The name of the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not given in the New Testament, and she has had a secondary but important position in Western Christian (Roman Catholic) thought. In the noncanonical writing called the *Proto-evangelium of James*, she is given the name Anne, and attention to her has grown since the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (the idea that Mary was born without original sin) was made a dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854. This doctrine is generally ignored by Protestants, and the name of Saint Anne unknown.

Devotion to Saint Anne seems to have originated in the fifth century in the Eastern Mediterranean, and an initial church was built and dedicated for her veneration by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (d. 565). Her feast day in the East (July 25) recalls the dedication of the church as well as the reputed arrival of her relics in Constantinople in 710. Her feast was extended to the Western Church in 1382, where it is generally celebrated on July 26.

Her veneration in the West found its greatest expression in northern France, although some of her relics made their way to Austria. A chapel to Saint Anne reputedly stood at Morbihan, Brittany (France), from the fifth to the seventh century. In 1625, a resident of Morbihan, Yves Nicolazic, had a vision of the virgin in which he was told to rebuild the chapel, which now exists as the church of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray. As the land was being cleared for the building, an old statue of Saint Anne was discovered. The coincidence of the apparition and the discovery of the statue spread through the country and to neighboring lands. Pilgrims began to arrive, and several of the more pious rulers offered financial support to the project. Anne of Austria (1601–1666) and Louis XIII of France (1601–1643) presented a relic of Saint Anne to the new chapel.

A second miraculous statue of Saint Anne was pulled from the sea by fishermen and now resides in the church of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Palue, also in Brittany. While carrying the statue to what would have been the nearest church, the men reached a spot where Saint Anne had requested the erection of a new church. The statue was said at this point to have become so heavy, the men could not further move it.

French sailors took their veneration of Saint Anne to Quebec in the mid-17th century. They built a chapel to her on the shore of the Saint Lawrence River, where they had found safety in a storm. A healing miracle that occurred in 1658 while a second expanded chapel was being built set the church apart as a focus for divine

healing. The church was rebuilt and expanded a number of times in the intervening years, and today the church of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré is part of a large complex of Catholic facilities that includes a hospital, monastery, and convent. It has become a favorite site among Native Americans and Canadians. It emerged in the 19th century as the major site of Christian festivities focused on Saint Anne.

In 1876, Archbishop Elzéar-Alexandre Cardinal Taschereau (1871–1898) requested that Saint Anne be named the patron saint of the province, which Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) granted on May 7. In 1892, Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) sent a relic of Saint Anne to the shrine, and in 1960, Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963) sent another.

In 1984, M. l'abbé Daniel Couture, at the time a young priest, organized a pilgrimage to the shrine each July 27 that includes a procession from several miles away, visiting one or more churches on the route. Upon arrival at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, they celebrate the litany of Sainte Anne and venerate the saint's relics.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Pilgrimage of Sainte Anne d'Auray.

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Saint Anne receives the Christ child from the Virgin Mary in this woodcut by Lucas Cranach. (Library of Congress)

Annunciation, Feast of the (March 25)

In the New Testament Gospel of Luke, the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary was announced to her by the Angel Gabriel:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came in unto her, and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee." But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, you shall conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." And Mary said unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God."

This event was and continues to be recounted as part of the Christmas story and in the fifth century, coincidental to the naming of the Virgin as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) became the basis of an additional separate celebration. Once on the church's calendar, churchmen voiced different understandings of its focus, and different locations held the celebration on different days.

The feast day originated in a wave of interest in the Virgin Mary, and many saw her as a primary focus of the event. Mariologists think of it as one of the four main observances of the Blessed Virgin. However, others emphasized the Christological aspect of the event, namely that it was an announcement of Christ's coming birth, as opposed to the fact that it was to Mary that the announcement was made. This Christological emphasis was reflected in the common name that was given to the celebration—the Feast of the Incarnation, or the Feast of the Good Tidings.

In the early church, the feast was celebrated on March 25, a date that many felt was also the date of the crucifixion. March 25 also collected recognition as the designated date of additional events in salvation history. Then, as the papacy developed in the early Middle Ages, March 25 was adopted by the popes as the first day of the new ecclesiastical year, a practice that flowed into the legal community, which for centuries used March 25 as the first day of the new legal year. That date remained in effect in England until 1752, where it was called Lady Day.

The primary alternative date for celebrating the Annunciation was December 18, the popular date in Spain for many centuries. In the 18th century, December 18 became the feast of the "Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary," the emphasis being on Mary's expectation of Jesus's soon arrival. This became a popular holiday in the Catholic Church through the 19th century and was made a public holiday in many predominantly Catholic countries.

The March 25 date, which tied together the beginning of Mary's pregnancy and the incarnation of God in Jesus as occurring nine months before Christmas (December 25), supplied the rationale for setting the beginning of the ecclesiastical and legal year. It also created some significant problems, for on the annual liturgical calendar in those years, March 25 occurred during Lent, Holy Week, or even on Easter Day. This situation was and is handled by moving the date for the celebration of the Annunciation. Should it fall on a Sunday in Lent, a day in which legal work would not be done, the Annunciation was celebrated on the following day (March 26). If it falls during Holy Week or on Easter, it is moved to the Monday following the Sunday after Easter. On occasion, the moving of the feast of the Annunciation would place it on the same day as the feast of Saint Joseph. In such cases, the feast of Saint Joseph is further moved in such a way as to not conflict.

Both the Anglicans and the Lutherans have continued to observe the March 25 date for celebrating the Annunciation. However, the separate feast day was abandoned by most Protestants and the account reintegrated into the celebration of Advent and/or Christmas.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Advent; Christmas; Easter; Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of; Holy Week; Joseph, Feast Day of St.

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Ansgar, Saint's Day of St. (February 3)

Saint Ansgar (801–865) is known as the “Apostle to the North,” meaning Scandinavia. His adult life had two phases. First, he was but 14 when he became a Benedictine monk at Corbie, France. The conversion of the king of Denmark (826) became the occasion of Ansgar moving to Denmark as a missionary. He had little missionary success over the next three years, and leaving Denmark to others, he moved on to Sweden. After two years' work there, the church recalled him home. In 831, he was named bishop of Hamburg (Germany) with responsibility for Scandinavia. His work was funded by Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Pious (814–840) but ceased upon Louis's death. Shortly thereafter, his work fell victim

to an invasion by Scandinavia, who burned Hamburg and returned Sweden and Denmark to their former Pagan religion.

The second phase of his life began with recovering his work in Hamburg and then reestablishing the mission to Scandinavia. He traveled on several occasions to the northland, and converted another of the kings of Denmark. His work in Sweden had a strange twist, the outcome of his casting lots with the Swedish king. Ansgar won and was allowed to send a new wave of missionaries there, though it would be several centuries before marked advances would be made in converting large numbers to Christianity.

Ansgar is remembered today by both Catholics and Lutherans. The former named him the patron saint of Denmark, Germany, and Iceland. He had been canonized by Pope Nicholas I (r. 858–867). In 1930, Swedish Lutheran bishop Nathan Soderblom (1886–1931) dedicated a chapel to Ansgar on the island of Bjorko, where he had worked for a number of years.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Boniface of Germany, Saint's Day of St.; Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.

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Anthony of Padua, Saint's Day of St. (June 13)

Saint Anthony of Padua, born Fernando Martins de Bulhões (c. 1195–1231), is one of several saints popularly associated with animals, especially horses, and who lost popularity with the advent of the automobile. He was born into a wealthy family related to the royal family of Portugal. Given a good education, as a young man he joined the Augustinian Order, but he later became familiar with the Franciscans and received permission to change his habit. Among the Franciscans, his preaching abilities were gradually revealed, and he was assigned to Lombardy in northern Italy and then became associated with Padua, outside Venice. He took ill in 1231 and died at the age of 35.

Anthony's preaching had made him a celebrity and there was a popular clamor for his canonization. Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–1241) responded and, in less than a year, proclaimed his sainthood. Meanwhile, many miracles were attributed to his intercession and he became known as a wonderworker. He subsequently became the patron saint of Padua, a number of cities in his homeland, and ultimately of

Portugal itself. He was named a Doctor of the Church in 1946. The celebration in his honor is still a popular holiday in Lisbon, where celebrations begin the evening before his day with roaming musicians filling the city's streets. In the morning, children take to the street to ask for a penny for Saint Anthony. This custom seems to have originated after the huge earthquake in 1755 that destroyed the Lisbon cathedral. The money raised was used for the reconstruction. Today, it goes to provide a big meal for youngsters.

As a popular preacher identified with Saint Francis of Assisi, Anthony also became associated with animals, and his day became a time to bring horses, mules, and other animals to churches for a blessing day. He also became another of the saints who was called upon for help in finding a proper mate. Those who were unsuccessful on Saint Valentine's Day could offer prayers to Anthony on the eve of his day, and then give a prospective mate a pot of fragrant basil that hid within it a love letter.

The attention to Anthony in southern Europe spread to the Americas. The Franciscans introduced Saint Anthony to the Native people of New Mexico, and Saint Anthony's Day became a prominent summer celebration each June at which the pueblo communities held an all-day community gathering complete with Mass at the local church and a party into the evening. The Italian community in New York that gathers around Saint Anthony's Shrine in Greenwich Village holds a weeklong celebration that culminates on June 13 with multiple masses at the church and an evening procession through the village with a statue of Saint Anthony in the lead. Additional celebrations are found at churches dedicated to Saint Anthony around the world, some emphasizing his patronage of children.

Saint Anthony of Padua is not to be confused with Saint Anthony the Abbott (251–356 CE), whose feast day in January is also a popular occasion for the blessing of animals in Latin America.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.; Forgiveness, Feast of

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Aparecida, Feast of Our Lady of (October 12)

The story of Our Lady of Aparecida (or Our Lady Who Appeared) goes back to 1716 and to three men fishing on the Paraiba River in Brazil. As they pulled their

otherwise empty nets from the water, they found a small terracotta statue of the Virgin Mary missing its head, which they informally began to call “Nossa Senhora Aparecida.” They subsequently continued their fishing and pulled up the statue’s head. Again they cast their nets, and this time the fish they were seeking filled the nets. Sometime later, the statue would be identified as the work of Frei Agostino de Jesus, a relatively famous artist monk from Sao Paulo. It was created around 1650. After the head was reattached, the three-foot-tall statue became the possession of one of the fishermen, Felipe Pedroso. His home became a popular place for neighbors to visit, and over the months and years, reports circulated of answers to prayers directed to it. The growing popularity of the statue led the Pedroso family to build a chapel where people could venerate it. Then in 1734, the local priest oversaw the construction of a larger chapel, which was in turn replaced by a basilica in 1834.

The new basilica was dedicated just as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (referring to the birth of the Virgin Mary without original sin) was enjoying a marked revival in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1854, Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) would declare it a dogma. Once placed in the new basilica, the small statue was identified as the Our Lady of the Conception. Also, in the wake of the new dogma (a number of additional Marian statements made by various popes through the remainder of the century), it was suggested that the crowning of statues of Mary was an appropriate way to venerate the virgin. Crowning affirms Mary as the mother of Jesus, the eternal King. The coronation of Our Lady of Aparecida occurred in 1904, on the 50th anniversary of the pronouncement of the Immaculate Conception. The statue was now referred to as *Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida* (Our Lady of the Conception Who Appeared), and as such, the Virgin Mary was designated the principal patroness of Brazil by Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) in 1930.

In the decade after World War II, pilgrimages to the basilica increased to the point that local officials found themselves confronted by the need for even larger facilities to accommodate the crowds. The plan finally approved included a structure shaped like a Greek cross (with its four arms of approximate equal length), 568 feet long and 551 feet wide. The central dome reached 230 feet in the air. It can accommodate 45,000 worshippers at any given time. The finished church turned out to be only slightly smaller than Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, and competes with the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, as the second largest church in the world. In 1980, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) consecrated the church as it neared completion. Four years later, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil declared it to be the largest Marian temple in the world.

The Feast Day for Our Lady of Aparecida is October 12, the day of the original discovery of the statue. This date has been designated a national holiday in Brazil (the largest Roman Catholic country in the world), while the Virgin’s Basilica has become the most popular pilgrimage site in all of Latin America. The church as of

2010 received more than six million visitors annually, with a concentration on October 12, December 8 (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception), and the other Marian feast days. October 12 has also emerged as a major day for Marian devotion in Portugal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of.

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Asalha Puja Day (“Dhamma Day”)

Asalha Puja, a day to pay homage to the Buddha, occurs on the full moon of the eighth lunar month (the third month in Myanmar/Burma, usually July on the Common Era calendar). During the first centuries, the arrangement of the Buddhist year was largely built around the rainy season, when the monks and nuns (the Sangha) stopped their travels and settled in one location for three months (roughly July through October). That practice continues in the south Asian Theravada communities, especially Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. Asalha Puja occurs the day before the beginning of the rainy season or Vassa Retreat.

In his 35th year, Gautama Buddha gave up the austerities he had been practicing and settled under the tree at Bodhi Gaya to begin the period of meditation that led to his enlightenment. When he announced his intention relative to abandoning the austere practices, his companions who shared those practices left him and went to Isipatana (Sarnath), the location of a Deer Park.

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha traveled to Sarnath to rejoin his former companions (five in number), knowing that they would be most capable of understanding what he had discovered relatively quickly. Following their reunion, he found that they understood what he was communicating, and they also became enlightened. The small group became the initial membership of the community of the enlightened ones, the Sangha. The discourse that Buddha delivered that day

was called Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra, in which he covered a number of Buddhist basics relative to the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Four Noble Truths. It was given on the full-moon day of Asalha, lunar month, Asalha, on the old Indian calendar. This also happened to have occurred at the beginning of the rainy season in southern Asia. Buddha and his companions spent that initial rainy season at Sarnath, where at a later date, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara would be built. By the time the Vassa Retreat ended, the original five had become monks, and had been joined by some 55 additional men attracted to the Buddha’s teachings who also chose the monastic life. After Vassa, they were sent out to teach the Dhamma around the countryside.

Asalha Puja Day commemorates the original act of delivering the first discourse at Sarnath, the act of teaching being termed “the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma,” to the five ascetics. The immediate result was the gaining of a first level of enlightenment by Kondanna, the senior among the five.

Asalha Puja Day (Boun Kao Phansa, Laos; Waso Full Moon, Myanmar) is a public holiday in southern Asian countries. On this day, Buddhists will go to the temple, where they will hear a discourse on the Dhamma (observing the Five Precepts or veneration of the Triple Jewels being popular topics) and join in a candlelight procession around the temple.

The role of candles in the celebration led to the development of processions that carried candles to the various temples/monasteries along with other gifts for the monks to use during the retreat. In places, the procession has become a parade, the most elaborate one having become the Candle Festival at Ubon Ratchathani, Isan, Thailand. Residents process with giant candles, each representing a particular temple or institution, some carved with scenes of Hindu or Buddhist mythology. The candles made for exhibition are displayed at the Tung Sri Muang Park on Asalha Puja Day and in the evening become the focus of candlelight processions. On the next morning, they are paraded through the city center.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Boun Ok Phansa; Vassa.

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Ascension Day

The Feast of the Ascension is a Christian holiday that commemorates the bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven as recorded in Acts 1:1–11. Until recently, this holy day fell on the sixth Thursday after Easter Sunday, the traditional 40 days between the resurrection and ascension in the biblical narrative. However, some Roman Catholic provinces have moved the celebration to the following Sunday to facilitate the obligation of the faithful to receive Mass as part of the Feast.

Writing in the fifth century, Augustine (354–430 CE) claimed that the feast had apostolic origins, and it is evident that by this time, the day was universally observed in the church. The Ascension emphasizes the entrance of Jesus into God’s heavenly presence. He is there concealed from sight but will return again (cf. Acts 1:11 and Col 3:3). The event further affirms that Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes believers into the heavenly kingdom so that members of his Body may live in the hope of one day being with him forever. Finally, the Feast of Ascension celebrates that having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, Jesus now intercedes as Mediator.

Ascension Day practices include a three-day “Rogation” period preceding the feast to invoke God’s mercy. The actual feast itself includes a procession of torches and banners symbolizing Christ’s journey to the Mount of Olives and entry to heaven, the extinguishing of the Paschal Candle, and an all-night vigil. White is the liturgical color of Ascension Day. The prayers and liturgy often include a Blessing of Beans and Grapes as part of the Mass in Commemoration of the Dead as the first fruits of the resurrection. In some churches, the scene of the Ascension is reenacted, elevating the figure of Christ above the altar through an opening in the roof of the church. The feast is followed by an “Afterfeast” of eight days, when hymns and readings carry on the theme.

In some countries, including Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, Ascension Day is a public holiday. Germany also holds its Father’s Day on the same date.

The Eastern Orthodox churches calculate the date of Easter differently, so its Ascension Day will usually be a week to a month later than in Western traditions. The earliest possible date for the Eastern feast is May 14, and the latest possible date is June 17. Some of the Oriental Orthodox churches, however, observe Ascension on the same date as the Western churches. Some Protestant churches, especially the Anglicans, observe Ascension Day and/or Ascension Sunday, but most do little more than pay lip service to the day. It is not observed in most free churches and post-Protestant groups, which have largely abandoned the traditional liturgical calendar.

Kevin Quast

See also Easter; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Liturgical Year—Western Christian.

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Ashokashtami

Ashokashtami is a festival to the Hindu deity Shiva held annually across eastern India (Orissa, Bengal, Bihar), and central India (Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh). It is based on a story from the ancient Hindu texts, the Puranas, concerning the attempts of Lord Rama (or Ramachandra) to kill the demon Ravana. His efforts were being thwarted as Ravana had the favor and protection of the Goddess Kali. He was advised that the way to defeat Ravana was to worship and propitiate Kali and thus change her allegiance away from the demon. Rama subsequently engaged in seven days of elaborate rituals that led to Kali withdrawing her support of Ravana, whom Rama subsequently killed easily.

Rama celebrated his victory by taking Shiva and Durga on a ride in his chariot. The modern Ashokashtami festival operates as a dramatic reenactment of the chariot ride of Rama, Shiva, and Durga. The killing of Ravana removed the “shoka” or sorrow from Rama, who was reunited with his wife Sita, whom Ravana held captive, and hence the festival received its name.

Ashokashtami is held in the eighth day of the waxing moon during the Indian lunar month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar). Among the main centers for the celebration is the Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. On this day, the statue of Shiva is placed on a large chariot and wheeled through the streets of the city about two kilometers to Rameswar Temple, where it will remain for four days and then be returned to its permanent home. Similar processions are held in other locations in the adjacent states. It is a popular regional festival that falls amid the larger celebration following the spring equinox, which also functions as the Indian New Year’s Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Durga Puja; Hanuman Jayanti; Mahashivaratri; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Ashura

Ashura, an important religious holiday for Muslims, occurs on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month on the Islamic calendar. The day had been acknowledged by Arabs prior to the emergence of Islam as a day for fasting and was identified with Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) by Jews. Muhammad (d. 632) initially identified it as a day of fasting for Muslims, and Sunni Muslims see it as a day to remember Moses, who is believed to have fasted on that day as he remembered God’s liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt. Muslims have also identified it with the day when Noah’s ark landed after the flood, and when Jonah was freed from the fish that had swallowed him.

Though Muhammad fasted on this day, the Ashura fast would later be superseded by the month of fasting during Ramadan. Thus the Ashura fast was downgraded to a voluntary (rather than mandatory) event in the Sunni Muslim community. Islamic tradition has associated this important day with biblical events recognized by Jews and Christians.

For Shi’a Muslims, however, Ashura has taken on an altogether different significance. On this day in 680, Husayn ibn Ali ibn Ali Talib (626–681), the grandson of the Prophet, along with male members of his family and some close companions, died at the hands of the forces of the Islamic Umayyad caliph Yazid (r. 680–683) in the desert of Karbala, Iraq. Husayn’s mutilated body would be buried in what is now a shrine in Karbala, while his sister Zaynab in Kufa and daughter Faṭimah al-Kubra were taken prisoner and carried to Damascus. This event would become one of the most important events recounted by Shi’a Muslims concerning their origins and is integral to understanding their distinctiveness from the Sunni Muslim community. It also led to Shi’a Muslims placing a high value on martyrdom. Commemoration of the event is traced to Zaynab and the prisoners in Damascus. Subsequently, pilgrims began to arrive in Karbala, and over the centuries annual commemorations evolved.

Shi’a Muslims begin their celebration of Ashura with 10 days of mourning for the death of Husayn that start with the arrival of the month of Muharram. Activities expressive of mourning become visible throughout the Shi’a-dominated areas of the Middle East, especially Iran, Iraq, and Azerbaijan, other countries with

strong Shi'a communities from Lebanon to India, and throughout the Shi'a diaspora worldwide. Mourners gather to sing, participate in street processions, and stage morality plays. Theatrical performances reenact the events of the Karbala tragedy.

Ashura is not a day of joy or celebration, but a day for mourning, remembrance, and repentance. Public lamentations can reach a frenzy on Ashura itself, especially in Iraq, as the day is frequently marked by young men beating their breasts with chains and/or slashing their heads to draw blood in commemoration of the spilling of Husayn's blood as he died. In Iran and areas where Persian influence is strong, people engage in the *rowzeh khani* (called a *qiraya* "reading" in Arabic-speaking Iraq). The word *rowzeh* is traced to a book of stories about Karbala, *The Garden of the Martyrs* (*Rawdat al-shuhada*), written by Husayn Waiz Kashifi around 1503, at the time of the rise of the Shi'a Safavid dynasty in Iran. The *rowzeh khani* includes lamentations, moving oratory, and readings about the events that transpired at Karbala.

The fact that Ashura commemorates a battle between two communities that live close to each other has allowed Ashura to become the occasion for violence, especially as Shi'a believers, always a minority in the Muslim world, assert themselves in the face of the larger Sunni community. Many Sunnis consider the Shi'as to be heretics. In 1884, in Trinidad and Tobago, 22 people were killed in what became known as the Hosay (Husayn) Massacre, when Shi'a Muslims attempted to commemorate Ashura against the orders of British authorities. In the 1930s, as part of this program to modernize Iran, Rezā Shāh Pahlavi (r. 1925–1941) found himself in conflict with the Iranian clergy as he introduced Western clothing. He later banned the gathering for Ashura as being too politically volatile.

Ashura was also banned for a number of years in Iraq during the regime of Saddam Hussein (r. 1979–2003), who privileged the minority Sunni community over the Shi'a majority. The celebration of Ashura made a quick comeback after his fall in 2003.

James A. Beverley

See also Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holidays; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival; Yom Kippur.

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Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent in the Western church. It introduces 40 days of fasting and penitential preparation for Easter. It is actually 46 days before Easter, but Sundays are excluded from the count. The basic practice of attending church and having one's forehead marked with ashes can be traced to the eighth century.

Each Good Friday, the palms used in worship are saved and burned. The resultant ashes are combined with holy water and the smoke of incense. The ashes are then saved and used in the next Ash Wednesday service. The believer approaches the altar at the beginning of the Ash Wednesday Mass to have their foreheads marked, and they continue to wear the ashes through the subsequent workday. The officiating priest will receive the ash from a participating colleague.

Besides Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans also celebrate Ash Wednesday, but many Protestants abandoned the practice, considering it (and Lent) as unbiblical observances. The practice has spread among Protestants in



A Catholic nun receives the mark of the cross on her forehead on Ash Wednesday in a church in San Jose, Costa Rica, on March 5, 2003. (AP/Wide World Photos)

the ecumenical age as they have developed ecumenical relationships and come to appreciate an expanded liturgical calendar.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Good Friday; Holy Week; Lent.

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Assumption of the Virgin (August 15)

The understanding of Jesus's mother Mary as one who bore him while still a virgin, and the subsequent definition of the doctrine of Mary as Theotokos (mother of God) in the fourth century, set the stage for widespread speculation on her life and its significance in God's plan of salvation. Such speculation would lead to the definition of Mary's own Immaculate Conception (the doctrine that Mary was conceived without sin and thus did not inherit original sin) as well as the doctrine of her assumption into heaven prior to death and before any bodily decay at the end of her earthly existence. In fact, what had happened to her had been lost to history, and several stories began to circulate, one being that she had died in Jerusalem. Epiphanius (c. 320–403), the bishop of Salamis (Cyprus), summarized the knowledge of Mary at the end of the fourth century as one of ignorance as to the end of her life. However, already, apocryphal works were circulating through the Christian community that filled in much of the information missing from the New Testament, and by the eighth century, John of Damascus (c. 676–749) openly reported his belief in Mary's assumption.

Over the centuries, the Eastern Orthodox tended to reject the doctrine of the assumption, believing that Mary died a natural death, an event commemorated annually on August 15 as the Feast of the Dormition. There exists in Jerusalem a traditional site of the Tomb of Mary, over which was built the Church of the Assumption. This church has been successively in Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, and, since 1757, again in Orthodox hands. Through the centuries, the assumption continued to be debated in the West. In the 16th century, Protestants rejected the idea, finding it not to be based on any biblical text. Roman Catholics, however, approached the doctrine from within a rich and evolving devotional culture built around the Virgin Mary. The popular veneration of the Virgin provided a context in which new doctrine could be theologically refined, and eventually new dogma affirmed by papal authority. Part of that context was the founding of a new

religious order, the Little Sisters of the Assumption, by Antoinette Fage, whose religious name was Mother Marie de Jésus (1824–1883), and Etienne Pernet (1824–1899) in France in 1865.

In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception to be Catholic dogma (required belief). Then, following a host of additional papal statements and actions emphasizing the importance of the virgin's work for the salvation of souls, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) declared the Assumption of the Virgin to be dogma in 1950.

The dogma of the Assumption of Mary is seen as symbolically confirming the promise of Jesus that all believers will also eventually be received into heaven. The commemoration on August 15, the traditional date upon which both Eastern and Western churches acknowledge the end of Mary's earthly existence, celebrates the physical elevation of both her sinless soul and incorrupt body into Heaven.

Like Sunday and a few other days in the liturgical calendar, the feast day of the Assumption of the Virgin is for Catholics a holy day of obligation, meaning that the faithful should attend Mass and refrain from any activities inconsistent with maintaining an attitude of worship. On this day, Polish Americans venerate Mary as Our Lady of the Flowers. Church services will feature hymns sung by children, and later in the day, celebrate for a time with native dances accompanied by the music of the polonaise.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Most Holy Name of Mary, Feast of the; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Auditor's Day

Auditing is the distinctive form of personal counseling that operates within the Church of Scientology. Auditing occurs with the use what is called an E-meter, a device held by the individual being counseled, which is seen as an aid in locating areas of spiritual distress. An auditor is a counselor trained in the reading and interpretation of the E-meter following the instructions laid down by church founder L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986).

Auditing occurs on every level of Scientology as individual church members seek to remove the aberration (engrams) that they believe that they accumulated not only in this life but in previous embodiments that their essential self (the Thetan) have had. While attention is generally focused on engram acquired in this life at the beginning, at the higher levels, all of the work is focused on engrams accumulated in previous lives, some reaching into the far distant past. As individuals move up the levels of instruction in Scientology, they have auditing as part of their general program of self-development. While most auditors have themselves completed the elementary and intermediate levels of Scientology, as one reaches the higher or OT (Operating Thetan) levels, the number begins to drop. One must have an auditor who is at or above the level of Scientology reached by the person being audited. Auditors receive their training at the various Saint Hill Organizations (which function as the church's seminaries), with advanced training for the highest levels of auditing for OTs at the advanced Organizations and the Flag Service Organization in Clearwater, Florida.

Auditors are considered to be doing an essential part of the ministry of the Church of Scientology, and their expertise is highly valued. They are seen as being in the forefront of applying the truths of Scientology in the lives of church members. They are called to maintain a high standard of practice and ethics.

Auditor's Day, held the second Sunday in September, recognizes the special role filled by auditors in making Scientology an effective force in the life of church members. This recognition is held at the local level during the Sunday church services. Not only are auditors in general acknowledged, but especially effective auditors are also singled out for their accomplishments.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Augustine of Canterbury, Saint's Day of St. (May 27)

Saint Augustine of Canterbury (d. c. 605), not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), led the first organized Christian missionary effort in England. He was one among a group of some 40 monks sent to evangelize Britain in 596 CE by Pope Gregory I (popularly known as Gregory the Great). There was already a small British Christian community, but it had developed independently of Roman leadership. Little is known of Augustine, or those with whom he traveled, prior to his initial commissioning by the pope. They were residents of the Saint Andrew's monastery that Gregory had established in Rome. As the group traveled northward into France, they heard tales of the dangerous environment

they were headed toward, and at one point they stopped, and Augustine returned to Rome to request that the mission be abandoned. Pope Gregory reassured him, put him in charge of the group, and gave him letters of introduction to the French officials, both secular and ecclesiastical, whom he would meet as he approached the English Channel.

Their first crisis came as they reached the channel and sought permission of King Ethelbert to enter his kingdom. He granted them access, even though he was not altogether accepting of their mission. They settled at Canterbury and began their work. As the work prospered, Augustine returned to the continent and was consecrated as the first archbishop of Canterbury, and he in turn baptized King Ethelbert. He constructed a church and monastery not far from the present cathedral. As the faith spread, additional sees were established at London and Rochester.

Work was sometimes slow, and Augustine did not always meet with success. Attempts to reconcile the new Anglo-Saxon Christians of Ethelbert's kingdom with the older Christian community (which had been driven into western England by Anglo-Saxon invaders) were never accomplished. He had more success in converting the Pagans in which he was assisted by some forward-looking missionary principles that Gregory had suggested—adopt the Pagan shrines for Christian worship rather than destroy them; transform Pagan rites and festivals into Christian feasts; and retain local customs. Augustine worked for only eight years in England, but he is credited with establishing the foundation from which the country would be converted. He did set up two neighboring dioceses in London and Rochester.

He died on May 26, 604. After their conquest of England, the Normans promoted the veneration of Augustine as a saint and pilgrimages to Canterbury. During King Henry I's (r. 1100–1135) reign, Augustine's relics were transferred to a new shrine, and the king established a six-day fair each September at Saint Augustine's Abbey. This shrine was destroyed during the 16th-century Reformation, and the present location of Augustine's relics remains unknown. Augustine is one of the patron saints of England. His commemoration is held on May 26, the day of his death, by the Church of England, and on May 27 or 28 by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Augustine of Hippo, Saint's Day of St; Gregory the Great, Saint's Day of St.; Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.

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Augustine of Hippo, Saint's Day of St. (August 28)

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), not to be confused with Augustine of Canterbury, was the longtime bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 395 till his death in 430, during which time he emerged as the foremost early theologian of Western Christianity. His theology would dominate the Roman Catholic Church for a millennium, until the rise of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), and become the principal source for the Protestant reformers in their theologies of grace, justification, and predestination. Much of our knowledge of Augustine comes from his own writings, especially the *Confessions*. A biography written by a close associate appears soon after his death.

Augustine was born of a Christian mother, Monica, and a non-Christian father, in Tagaste, Numidia, in what is now Algeria. He had a good education. A Pagan like his father, he was attracted to Manicheism, and with their help, he landed a teaching job in Milan. Here he met Ambrose, the Christian bishop of Milan, and converted to Christianity. He was baptized in 387. On his way home with plans to build a monastery, he stopped in Hippo, and the Christians chose him to become their priest. He was elected bishop in 395.



Saint Augustine of Hippo. (Library of Congress)

Augustine's career was marked by three controversies with Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism. In contrast to the Manichees, who saw a dualistic world in which good and evil were enduring forces in the universe with good associated with spirit and evil with the body, Augustine affirmed the goodness of all creation both material and spiritual.

As bishop of Hippo, Augustine found himself in the center of Donatism, a movement named after Donatus (d. 355), which attempted to respond to those who had betrayed their faith during the Great Persecution by Diocletian (303–305). The Donatists wanted to maintain a pure church. Augustine declared that the sacraments were ultimately administered by Christ, and hence not dependent on the spiritual or

moral condition of the priest. This principle would emerge as the principle of *ex opere operato* that considers a sacrament act to be valid even if the priest administering it is personally unworthy. In the heat of the controversy, in 405, he gave approval to an imperial edict that deprived the Donatists of legal standing.

On two occasions Augustine engaged the Pelagians, initially challenging the Celtic British lay ascetic Pelagius (c. 354–c. 430) and his followers, with his assertion of original sin and the dominant role of grace in the believer's life. Pelagius believed that even fallen humans retained the ability to choose between good and evil, in a theological sense. With Augustine's support, Pope Innocent I (r. 401–417) charged Pelagius with heresy. At a later date, Julian of Eclanum (c. 386–c. 455), bishop of Apulia in central Italy, charged Augustine of perpetuating Manichaeism in his theology of original sin. Augustine answered the charges, and Julian would be condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Amid the controversies, Augustine wrote his most important single work, *The City of God*, in which he addressed the issue of Christianity's role in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. He refutes the charges of Christianity's responsibility for the fall with the presentation of a view of history in which the City of God struggles with the City of Man, a struggle ending only in the end-time.

Augustine died on August 28, 430, as the vandals lay siege to Hippo. They eventually burned the city, except for the cathedral and Augustine's library. According to tradition, Augustine's body was later moved to Pavia, in northern Italy, where it continues to reside. Others claim it was taken to the island of Sardinia, where the relics were placed in what is now the Church of Saint Augustine in Bonaria, Cagliari.

Both Augustine and his mother Monica were named saints. Monica's feast day is August 27 and that of her son the next day. Though Augustine is remembered as a great theologian, relating to him as a saint has been relatively muted, possibly because the places in which he lived and worked are now in predominantly Muslim areas of North Africa. Neither of the two sites claiming his relics has become prominent targets of pilgrimages, though the relics from Pavia were taken to Rome for viewing during the week of November 7–15, 2004, as part of the 1,650th anniversary celebrations of his birth. With some concern over what they consider his theological errors that contributed to the split between the East and West, the Eastern Orthodox churches acknowledge Augustine's saintliness and celebrate his feast on June 15.

Meanwhile, Monica died at Ostia and was forgotten until the Middle Ages, when memory of her was recovered. Veneration abounded in the 13th century, and a feast day was authorized for May 4. In 1430, Pope Martin V (r. 417–431) had her relics transferred to Rome, and during their movement, a number of miracles were reported. These relics were later placed in a new church built in Saint Augustine's honor. Her feast day would later be moved to the day before that of her son.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Augustine of Canterbury, Saint's Day of St.

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Aurobindo, Birth Anniversary of Sri (August 15)

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), born Aravinda Akroyd Ghose, was an early nationalist and freedom fighter in India who in later life became a scholar and spiritual teacher, for which he is most remembered today.

As a young man, Ghose received a good Western education, including two years at King's College, London. He then began a career in government service in India. He also began to actively involve himself in the emerging struggle for Indian independence from British control. Through the first decade of the 20th century, he became increasingly active in the nationalist struggle and was on several occasions arrested. Then in 1910, he withdrew from politics and moved to Pondicherry, a French enclave on the east coast of India, and began to concentrate on spiritual issues. For many years, he had practiced meditation and yoga, and in 1907, he had a significant experience of inner illumination. During one period of incarceration, he had had repeated mystical encounters. After four years of intense practice, he began a periodical called *Arya*, in which he published chapter by chapter many of the books that later made him famous. About this same time, he began his collaboration with Mirra Richard (1878–1973), later known among Aurobindo's disciples as simply "the Mother."

Aurobindo proved to be a creative and visionary thinker in the tradition of the Indian Vedanta school. He proposed a system of thought he called Integral Yoga (not to be confused with the Integral Yoga teachings of Indian-American Swami Satchidananda). Aurobindo proposed a yoga that sought to harmonize the different traditional paths of yoga—karma, bhakti, jnana—and also to reconcile the different approaches of Vedanta and Tantra. Many in both Asia and the West found his work attractive.

On November 24, 1926, Aurobindo experienced what was termed the descent of the divine consciousness into the physical. As a result, he retired from contact with the world and from that point communicated to his growing following through the Mother. She led in the building of his movement internationally. Aurobindo lived to see the fruition of much of his life's work when on his 75th birthday, August 15, 1947, Indian independence was declared.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram, founded in 1926, continues to operate with slightly more than 2,000 members in Pondicherry and a loosely affiliated set of ashrams and centers scattered around the globe. The Mother also led in the founding of

Auroville, a utopian urban experiment based on actualizing Sri Aurobindo's idea. While never reaching its major goals, it continues to evolve.

The celebration of the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo across India is somewhat lost in the celebration of India's independence each August 15; however, it is a holy day at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Thousands of people from all over the world make their pilgrimage to Pondicherry to remember and honor Aurobindo and visit the place where he lived the last decades of his life ashram. Programs are conducted throughout the day at both the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. A variety of commemorative activities are held at the ashrams and centers around the world for Aurobindo's admirers who cannot travel to India.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Mother, Birthday of the; Siddha Day.

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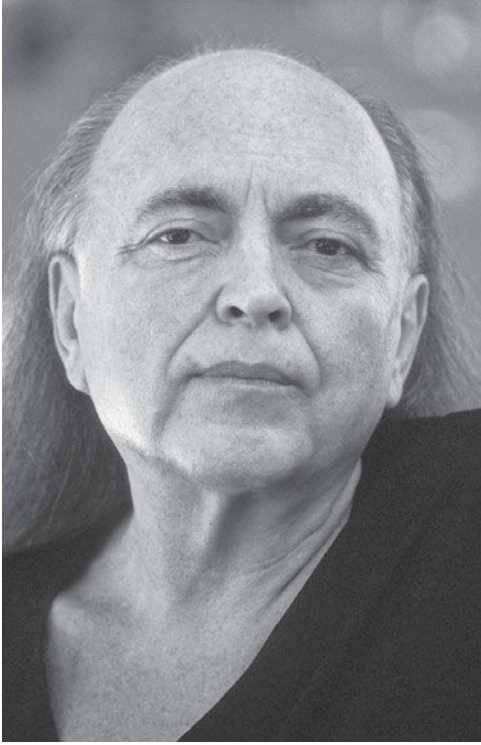
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Autumn Equinox. See Fall Equinox

Avatar Adi Da Samraj's Birthday (November 3)

Avatar Adi Da Samraj (born Franklin Jones, 1939–2008), the founder of what at various times was known as the Free Daist Communion and Adidam, was a American spiritual teacher of Advaita Vedanta, a monistic form of Indian Hindu thought that sees the differentiations of normal consciousness to be unreal. In essence, the individual self (Atman) is identical to the Whole (Brahman). Advaita Vedantists generally believe that a person must learn the truth of Brahman as the only reality from a guru (teacher) who has himself or herself already fully realized the truth, and has experienced complete enlightenment.

Early in his spiritual career, Jones asserted that he had been born fully enlightened but had been forced by the circumstance of his growing-up years to relinquish that state. As a young man, he began a spiritual search that led him to an Indian teacher, Swami Muktananda (1908–1982), who became a catalyst for his recovering his enlightened state. He subsequently founded his own religious community, originally known as the Dawn Horse Community. Over the next years, as he taught and the community progressed, both he and the community frequently changed names as an indication of their growing relationship. Baring the name/title Avatar Adi Da Samraj, Jones died in 2008.



Avatar Adi Da Samraj (The Avataric Samrajya of Adidam Pty Ltd., as trustee for The Avataric Samrajya of Adidam. All rights reserved. Perpetual copyright claimed. Used by permission of the copyright owner.)

The Adidam community begins a three-month period of celebration on October 23 (the anniversary of his receiving citizenship from the nation of Fiji), with the November 3 commemoration of their teacher's birthday as the high point. While he was alive, it was a time of gatherings and presenting him with various gifts and tokens of gratitude for being the students' teacher. Since his death, it has been a time for gatherings and remembering the years of his presence. Featured at such gatherings are stories of individuals' appropriation of the guru's teachings, their gratitude at having a teacher/student relationship with him, and the changes both wrought in their life.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Avataric Divine Self-Emergence, Day of.

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Avataric Divine Self-Emergence, Day of (January 11)

Avatar Adi Da Samraj (born Franklin Jones, 1939–2008), who was the founder of what at various times was known as the Free Daist Communion and Adidam, was a American spiritual teacher of Advaita Vedanta, a monistic form of Indian Hindu thought. Advaita Vedantists sees the differentiations of normal consciousness to be unreal, and that the individual self (Atman) is identical to the Whole (Brahman). According to Advaita Vedantists, for a person to learn the truth of

Brahman as the only reality, he or she must receive instruction from a guru (teacher) who has already fully realized the truth and experienced complete enlightenment.

Early in his spiritual career, Jones asserted that he had been born fully enlightened but had to relinquish that state due to the circumstance associated with his growing-up years. Swami Muktananda (1908–1982), an Indian teacher whom Jones discovered during a spiritual search as a young man, became a catalyst for Jones's recovery of his enlightened state. He subsequently founded his own religious community, originally known as the Dawn Horse Community. In 1983, he relocated to the island of Fiji with a small group of disciples he had chosen to work with more closely.

Some years into his teaching work, on January 11, 1986, he was speaking to his disciples when he suddenly collapsed. A physician was called, and he finally regained consciousness. He spent the next two weeks in seclusion, and only afterwards explained to his devotees what he understood had occurred. The years since his founding of the community had been characterized by his submission to and identification with the needs and sufferings of his disciples. This phase of his work had been completed, and thus the Divine Power that enabled him to accomplish that work left him. It was now replaced by a new Power. Avatar Adi Da had fully descended as a divine person into the human vehicle that had been Franklin Jones. This event would be described as the Avataric Divine Self-Emergence, and represented, among other things, a new, more profound connection with humanity. At this point, Adi Da was claiming to be a divine incarnation.

This event came to be seen as being on the same level of importance as his recovering his enlightenment earlier, but then significantly to surpass that event. Among the members of the Adidam community, the first event is noted but not commemorated, while the second has become a holy day and time for community gatherings and remembrance of what occurred in 1986.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Adi Da Samrajashram, Anniversary of Adi Da's First Footstep on; Native Establishment beyond East and West.

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Awwal Muharram. See New Year's Day

Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days) (February 25–March 1)

Most religions have a season of gift-giving and good cheer, and for Bahá'ís, this is “Ayyám-i-Há” (“Days of Há”; February 25–March 1, sunset to sunset). The observance of “Ayyám-i-Há” is creatively expressed. For instance, in 2007, the Bahá'í community in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, hosted their 40th annual “Ayyám-i-Há tea party” which Mayor Fred Eisenberger and Member of Parliament David Sweet attended—even though this was a decidedly nonpolitical event. (Bahá'ís shun partisan politics, which they see as divisive). (See “Bahá'í Intercalary Days Time of Fellowship, Charity; Party Is Now a 40-year-old Community Tradition,” *Ancaster News*, March 23, 2007, 11.) This is just one example of how “Ayyám-i-Há” may be celebrated. It is also a day of service to the wider community, as the examples provided below show.

So what is “Ayyám-i-Há”? The Bahá'í Calendar is made up of 19 months of 19 days each, which totals 361 days (see “Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship”), to which are added four (or, in leap years, five) “Intercalary Days” (the other name by which Ayyám-i-Há is known), to harmonize with the 365-day (366 in leap years) solar year. Thus Ayyám-i-Há is a Bahá'í festival that serves calendrical and community purposes. This season of joy and giving precedes a 19-day period of restraint and contemplation known as the Bahá'í Fast (March 2–20, sunset to sunset), in which Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. (See “Nineteen-Day Feast [Bahá'í].”) Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, ordained Ayyám-i-Há as follows:

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! . . . Let the days in excess of the months be placed before the month of fasting. . . . It behoveth the people of Bahá, throughout these days, to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify His Name . . . Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of all mankind. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 24–25)

As this passage of Bahá'í scripture indicates, this time of festivity (“good cheer”) is not only to have a good time, but to do some good at the same time, by giving to the less fortunate. It is a time of both cheer and charity, in which reaching out to those in need enriches the quality of this time and renders it all the more worthwhile.

The numerical (*abjad*) value of the Arabic/Persian letter “Há” is five, which corresponds to the potential number of intercalary days. The Bahá'í Writings attach symbolic significance to the letter “Há,” which represents, *inter alia*, the mysterious and transcendent “Essence” of God. Since the days and months of the Bahá'í

calendar are named after some of the “attributes” of God, the “Days of Há” may symbolize the transcendence of the essence of God over the attributes of God, which represent the “nature” of God as manifest in creation, and as perfectly manifested in the “Manifestations of God.” This is a Bahá'í term for the great prophets and messengers of God, including, *inter alia*, Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, whom Bahá'ís recognize as great God-inspired truth-bearers and lawgivers in their respective religious eras.

Thus, Ayyám-i-Há can signify the “Days of God” and are thus invested with spiritual meaning beyond their pragmatic calendrical function, where symbolism and celebration go hand in hand. As one report stated: “Ayyám-i-Há can be thought of as days outside of time, days that symbolize eternity, infinity and the mystery and unknowable Essence of God Himself.” (“‘Days Outside of Time’ Festival Reveres Eternal Essence of God” [2008].)

Shoghi Effendi (Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, who led the Bahá'í world from 1921 to 1957 and who furthered the development of the system of elected councils at the local, national, and international levels that administer Bahá'í affairs today), wrote: “As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers, it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing of such holidays as Christmas and New Year’s, and to have their festal gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Rúz.” (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1938; cited in *Lights of Guidance*, 302.) In practical terms, young Bahá'í children in cultures where the celebration of Christmas is pervasive may be inclined to view Ayyám-i-Há as “Bahá'í Christmas,” as it is most likely a time when they will receive gifts from family and friends. In turn, Bahá'í parents often find this a good time to strengthen the children’s identity as Bahá'ís, by holding Ayyám-i-Há parties to which they can invite their friends and celebrating it with their classmates at school when possible. A Bahá'í children’s book, *The Ayyám-i-Há Camel*, shows one family’s way of personalizing the holiday: inventing an “Ayyám-i-Há Camel” to represent the gift-giving nature of this Bahá'í festival.

Bahá'ís celebrate Ayyám-i-Há worldwide, since the Bahá'í Faith has been established in every country in the world, except for the Vatican and North Korea, making it the second-most widespread religion in the world today, next to Christianity. Among the world’s six million Bahá'ís, Ayyám-i-Há traditions are highly diverse and “in the making.” In 2008 in Zambia, for instance, one Bahá'í blogger posted: “Last Friday we had an Ayyám-i-Há party with the children’s classes. We had a treasure hunt, a piñata, a water balloon fight and some arts+crafts! The kids had so much fun.” (Karrie, “Service in Zambia,” online at <http://serve-zambia.blogspot.com>.) Bahá'í families and communities are to remain free to creatively express their observance of this occasion, so as to avoid creating hard-and-fast customs or rituals.

Some other examples of ways in which Ayyám-i-Há has been celebrated include: sending “Ayyám-i-Há cards” to friends and family; having an annual

family “Ayyám-i-Há dinner”; organizing treasure hunts for Bahá'í children and their friends; bringing small presents to a Bahá'í child's kindergarten classmates and organizing an edible art activity; giving children an “Ayyám-i-Há present” on each day of the four or five days; hanging “Ayyám-i-Há stockings”; baking “Ayyám-i-Há cookies” (in the shape of a nine-pointed star, a symbol of the Bahá'í Faith); making Bahá'í prayer beads; decorating the home with nine-pointed stars; making “Ayyám-i-Há banners” with pockets for small gifts; having a community bowling party or pancake party; etc.

As for Ayyám-i-Há charity and service projects, these examples are representative: organizing a food drive or hunger relief for donating food to local food banks; paying surprise visits to friends or home-bound acquaintances, with heartwarming displays of friendship and songs; visiting people in hospitals and homes for the aged; providing crafts activities for residents at nursing homes; giving gift packages to people at homeless shelters; and so forth.

In 2008 in Malaysia, for instance, the Local Bahá'í Youth Committee of Kuching organized a blood donation campaign at the Kuching Bahá'í Centre in Malaysia. In 2007, the Bahá'ís joined with Temple Israel, a conservative synagogue in Albany, New York, in co-organizing a multicultural music and dance concert in the majestic sanctuary at Temple Israel on February 25, 2007, during which \$1,701.50 was raised among the some 200 attendees and donated to the Food Pantries for the Capital District. In 2003 in Singapore, Bahá'ís observed Ayyám-i-Há with a blood donation drive, followed by a picnic for families in a beachside park. Recently, “home visits” seem to be a popular mode of service among Bahá'ís.

There is a special Bahá'í prayer for Ayyám-i-Há (found in most Bahá'í prayer books), and in which these blessings are invoked:

I implore Thee, O Thou the King of kings and the Pitier of the downtrodden, to ordain for them the good of this world and of the world to come. Write down for them, moreover, what none of Thy creatures hath discovered, and number them with those who have circled round Thee, and who move about Thy throne in every world of Thy worlds. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, 236–37)

Here, God is represented as “the Pitier of the downtrodden,” which makes the one who is praying mindful of those who are less fortunate, and of the need to reach out to make this world a better place. For Bahá'ís, personal salvation is bound up with social salvation, in that personal transformation is dynamically related to the efforts a person makes to transform society. The Bahá'í Intercalary Days are therefore all about good cheer, hospitality, and doing good for others, when celebrations and service go hand in hand.

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See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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B

Báb, Festival of the Birth of the (October 20)

The Festival of the Birth of the Báb is one of five Bahá'í festivals and one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended. Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad of Shiraz, known by his spiritual title as “the Báb” (“the Gate”), was born on October 20, 1819, in Shíráz, Persia (now Iran). The Báb was the founder of a 19th-century new religious movement generally known as Bábism, the substance of which was transformed into what is now known as the Bahá'í Faith.

The Báb declared himself to be the long-awaited Qá'im (“Ariser”/“Resurrector”), the expected eschatological deliverer (known in Sunni Islam as the “Mahdī”), who, according to Islamic tradition, would come to revive Islam when it is at its lowest ebb. While proclaiming himself to be an independent “Manifestation of God,” the Báb also spoke of the imminent advent of the Promised One, or “Him whom God shall make manifest.” One of the Báb's followers, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), would later receive revelations confirming that he was that Promised One heralded by the Báb.

According to Armin Eschraghi, the Báb established a new Faith that fulfilled all the criteria of an independent religion: a new founder, newly revealed scriptures, a new set of metaphysical and theological teachings distinct from those of Islam, and new religious laws and principles. In revealing his new code of laws (called the *Bayán*), the Báb pursued three major goals: (1) paving the way for the advent of the Promised One; (2) provoking the clerical establishment and shattering the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority; and (3) proving the independence of his own religion as distinct from Islam.

Soon after the Báb publicly proclaimed his prophetic mission beginning on the evening of May 22, 1844, the Persian government began to suppress the movement, and violence ensued. The Báb was arrested and executed by a firing squad of 750 musketeers on July 9, 1850, in Tabríz, Persia. Subsequent to an unauthorized and ill-fated attempt on the life of the Sháh of Persia in 1852, the Sháh ordered the most brutal tortures and deaths of a great number of Bábís, with estimates ranging from around 5,000 to 20,000 martyrs, who, as Browne described it, were subjected to “[t]errible . . . modes of inflicting death. . . . Of the unfortunate Bábís, some were hewn in pieces, some were sawn asunder, some were flayed with whips, some were blown from the mouths of mortars” (Browne, “Bábíism,” in *Religious Systems of the World*, 348).

In the fall of 1852, arrested in the wake of this brutal persecution, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the notorious Siyáh-Chál (“Black Pit”), during which time he experienced a series of visions that awakened him to his prophetic destiny. He was released but banished, exiled successively to Baghdad (1853–1863), Constantinople/Istanbul (1863), Adrianople/Edirne (1863–1868), and thence to the prison-city of ‘Akká, the vilest penal colony of the Ottoman Empire. In 1892, Bahá'u'lláh passed away in Bahjí, near ‘Akká in Palestine (now Israel).

In his article on “Bábism” published that same year, Browne wrote: “I say nothing of the mighty influence which, as I believe, the Bábí faith will exert in the future, nor of the new life it may perchance breathe into a dead people; for, whether it succeed or fail, the splendid heroism of the Bábí martyrs is a thing eternal and indestructible.” The “Bábí faith” that Browne spoke of was succeeded by the Bahá'í Faith, which has since spread worldwide to become the most widely diffused world religion next to Christianity, according to the 2001 *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

Today, Bahá'ís accept the Báb as a John the Baptist figure, whose words and actions heralded the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh, but also as the cofounder of the Bahá'í Faith. Unlike John the Baptist in relation to Jesus Christ, the Báb revealed much in substance, both in terms of doctrine and religious laws, that was subsequently revoiced and reenacted, with certain revisions, by Bahá'u'lláh.

Although the Báb did not instruct his followers to formally observe the day of his birth, for that occasion, Bahá'u'lláh had revealed the Lawḥ-i Mawlúd, which awaits an authorized translation. Today, Bahá'ís worldwide annually celebrate the Birth of the Báb on October 20 as a holy day, with work and school suspended for the day. There being no required observances, Bahá'ís are free to creatively organize commemorative activities, which, although attended mostly by Bahá'ís, are open to people of all faiths and persuasions.

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See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the (May 23)

The Festival of the Declaration of the Báb is one of five Bahá'í festivals, and nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended. This holy day commemorates and celebrates the prophetic mission of the Báb, whose short-lived faith-community, the Bábí religion, was succeeded by the Bahá'í Faith, and whose doctrines—as well as several significant religious laws and observances—were taken up in the Bahá'í religion, effectively making the Báb “the martyr Prophet and co-founder of their Faith” (Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, 233) alongside its principal founder, Bahá'u'lláh.

The Báb (1819–1850), whose given name was Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz, was the precursor and herald of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), whose given name was Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí. The Báb's relation to Bahá'u'lláh is somewhat analogous to John the Baptist's role as the precursor and herald of Jesus Christ. By “Declaration” is meant two things: (1) the Báb's announcement of his prophetic mission; and (2) the moment when the Báb's first disciple, Akhúnd Mullá Ḥusayn Bushrú'í (1813–1849), recognized the Báb's prophetic mission and became the first believer. Thus, the Declaration of the Báb took place on the evening of May 22, 1844. The signal moment was 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset, as the Báb himself states, in *Persian Bayán* 2:7 and 6:13, and also in the *Kitáb-i Panj Sha'n* (“Book of [the] Five Modes [of Revelation]”), revealed exactly six lunar years later, on March 19, 1850.

The Declaration of the Báb is one of the “two Most Great Festivals” which, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, is “that day on which We [Bahá'u'lláh] raised up the One [the Báb] Who announced unto mankind the glad tidings of this Name [Bahá'u'lláh], through which the dead have been resurrected and all who are in the heavens and on earth have been gathered together” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 59 [brackets added]). The Declaration of the Báb actually falls on the Gregorian calendar date of May 22 in the evening (i.e., 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset), but since the Bahá'í day begins at sunset on what would normally be regarded in the West as the evening before May 23 (i.e., on the evening before the Muslim lunar date of Friday, the fifth day of Jamádíyu'l-Avval AH 1260 or May 23, 1844). Thus, the Declaration of the Báb is formally listed as May 23, even though it is observed on the evening of May 22.

The other “Most Great Festival” is the 12-day “Festival of Riḍván” (April 21–May 2). What the two “Most Great Festivals” have in common is that they commemorate the prophetic declarations of the “Twin Founders” of the Bahá'í Faith,

the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Of the two festivals, the Festival of Ridván (“Paradise”) is preeminent (i.e., the “King of Festivals”), since the Báb not only declared his own prophetic mission, but heralded the imminent advent of a messianic figure referred to as “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” whose subsequent appearance, as Bahá'u'lláh, the majority of the Báb's followers (known as “Bábís”) later accepted.

Historically, the Declaration of the Báb is to be understood within the context of 19th-century Persia (now Iran). Messianic fervor had been ignited across Persia over the expected return of the Twelfth Imam, who was said to have disappeared in the Islamic year of 260 AH and who had gone into occultation for a period of 1,000 lunar years. Thus, in the Islamic year 1260 AH (1844), Persia was charged with what scholars call “eschatological tension.” The Báb declared that his appearance signaled the return of the Twelfth Imam. In each succeeding year of his short mission, the Báb advanced progressively greater prophetic claims. During the last three years of his ministry and prior to his martyrdom on July 9, 1850, the Báb declared that his real station was not only that of the (return of) the Twelfth Imam, but also a new Prophet and “Manifestation of God,” empowered to abrogate the laws of Islam and to reveal a new set of divine laws in their stead.

Although several accounts present different versions of the event, the one that is the most widely accepted is, briefly, as follows: In Persia, two influential theologians, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í (d. 1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, proclaimed the imminent return of the Imam Mahdí. (“Mahdí” is a religious term identical to the “Qá'im” in Shi'í Islamic eschatology.) Before Sayyid Kázim died in 1843, he instructed his disciples to scatter in search of the promised Mahdí, who would soon be revealed. One of the more impressive young Shaykhís, Mullá Ḥusayn, had traveled to the Persian city of Shíráz and was mysteriously drawn to a young merchant, Sayyid 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz, who invited Mullá Ḥusayn to his home that night, May 22, 1844. Of that momentous experience, Mullá Ḥusayn recounts:

When I first started upon my quest, I determined to regard the two following standards as those whereby I could ascertain the truth of whosoever might claim to be the promised Qá'im. The first was a treatise which I had myself composed, bearing upon the abstruse and hidden teachings propounded by Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kázim. Whoever seemed to me capable of unravelling the mysterious allusions made in that treatise, to him I would next submit my second request, and would ask him to reveal, without the least hesitation or reflection, a commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, in a style and language entirely different from the prevailing standards of the time. . . .

I was revolving these things in my mind, when my distinguished Host again remarked: “Observe attentively. Might not the Person intended by Sayyid Kázim be none other than I?” I thereupon felt impelled to present to Him a copy of the treatise which I had with me. “Will you,” I asked Him, “read this book of mine and look at its pages with indulgent eyes? I pray you to overlook my weaknesses and failings.” He graciously complied with

my wish. He opened the book, glanced at certain passages, closed it, and began to address me. Within a few minutes He had, with characteristic vigour and charm, unravelled all its mysteries and resolved all its problems. Having to my entire satisfaction accomplished, within so short a time, the task I had expected Him to perform, He further expounded to me certain truths which could be found neither in the reported sayings of the imáms of the Faith nor in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kázim. These truths, which I had never heard before, seemed to be endowed with refreshing vividness and power. . . .

He then proceeded to say: “Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih of Joseph.” He took up His pen and with incredible rapidity revealed the entire Súrih of Mulk, the first chapter of His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph. The overpowering effect of the manner in which He wrote was heightened by the gentle intonation of His voice which accompanied His writing. Not for one moment did He interrupt the flow of the verses which streamed from His pen. Not once did He pause till the Súrih of Mulk was finished. I sat enraptured by the magic of His voice and the sweeping force of His revelation. At last I reluctantly arose from my seat and begged leave to depart. He smilingly bade me be seated, and said: “If you leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: ‘This poor youth has lost his mind.’” At that moment the clock registered two hours and eleven minutes after sunset. . . .

“This night,” He declared, “this very hour will, in the days to come, be celebrated as one of the greatest and most significant of all festivals.” (Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 57–61)

The preceding eyewitness account by Mullá Ḥusayn narrates the event of the Báb’s Declaration, but not its substance. What did the Báb announce? What did the Báb proclaim? The Báb called upon the kings and rulers of the earth to recognize the truth of his prophetic mission and to follow his religion. The Súrah of Mulk (“Chapter on Sovereignty”) states, in part:

O concourse of kings and of the sons of kings! Lay aside, one and all, your dominion which belongeth unto God.

O King of Islam! Aid thou, with the truth, . . . Him Who is Our Most Great Remembrance . . . and . . . subdue, with the truth and by His leave, the countries, for in this world thou hast been mercifully invested with sovereignty, and wilt, in the next, dwell, nigh unto the Seat of Holiness, with the inmates of the Paradise of His good-pleasure. (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, 41–42)

“Verily, the essence of religion is none other than submission unto This Remembrance [the Báb]. Thus whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance [the Báb]. For God will inscribe his

name in the Book of the Righteous as a true Muslim, and he will be praised as one who is faithful. Whoso rejecteth this true Islam, God shall not accept, on the Day of Resurrection, any of his deeds. . . .

We verily have moved the mountains upon the earth, and the stars upon the Throne, by the power of the one true God, around the Fire which burneth in the centre of Water, as ordained by this Remembrance. (Provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 142 and 68 [brackets added])

The Báb claimed to fulfill the long-awaited return of the Twelfth Imam—who Shi‘i Muslims identified as the “Mahdī” expected by Sunni Muslims. This messianic figure, also known as the Qá‘im (“Ariser”/“Resurrector”) would appear at the end of the time, thereby marking the end of the Islamic dispensation. The Báb, at first, attracted a handful of disciples whose religion, in turn, rapidly attracted numerous followers across Persia, although the Bábí religion itself was quite short-lived. The Bábí movement thus emerged in the middle of the 19th century as the latest and most dramatic example of chiliastic/millenarian aspirations in modern Islam. The Báb’s claim of divine authority, and its ideological underpinnings, naturally challenged the finality of the Islam and hence aroused the opposition of the religious establishment.

The Báb had a cyclical view of history. Religions are divine in origin, yet, like spring and winter, seasonably have their rise and decline. Divinely revealed religions are, in their pure form, quintessentially harmonious and one in essence. In their heyday, religions are each suited to the needs of society in their particular day and age. When, in the course of social evolution, a religion becomes obsolete, it must be renewed and replaced by a new expression of divine Reality. Islam had run its course, and a new religion was on the horizon, with the Báb as the new messenger of God. These ideas, along with the Báb’s metaphorical interpretation of the Islamic Resurrection (*Qíyámat*), presaged the Bahá’í doctrine of “progressive revelation.”

Although, at first, the Báb’s claims and doctrines were couched in pious Islamic language, what the Báb went on to do was quite revolutionary. The Báb, according to Armin Eschraghi, established a new, post-Islamic faith that fulfilled all the criteria of an independent religion: a new founder, newly revealed scriptures, a new set of metaphysical and theological teachings distinct from those of Islam, and new religious laws and principles. In revealing his new code of laws as the *Persian Bayán* (1848), the Báb pursued three major goals: (1) paving the way for the advent of the Promised One; (2) provoking the clerical establishment and shattering the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority; and (3) proving the independence of his own religion as distinct from Islam.

The Bábí movement spread like wildfire across Persia during the period from 1845 to 1847. The Báb was imprisoned and, in the summer of 1848, a farcical trial took place that, by all accounts, was intended to humiliate the Báb. The Báb was bastinadoed and his imprisonment prolonged. Shi‘i clerics stirred up popular sentiment against the Bábís, who were attacked across Persia by various mobs. The

Bábís grouped to defend themselves in the fortress-shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí, and in Zanján and Nayríz. Clerics finally issued a death warrant, and the Báb was executed by a firing squad of 750 musketeers on July 9, 1850, in Tabríz, Persia.

After an ill-fated attempt on the life of the Sháh of Persia on August 15, 1852, by two aggrieved Bábí youths, the Sháh ordered the most brutal tortures and deaths of Bábís (and, subsequently, Bahá'ís), with estimates ranging from around 5,000 to 20,000 martyrs, who, as Browne described it, were subjected to "[t]errible . . . modes of inflicting death. . . . Of the unfortunate Bábís, some were hewn in pieces, some were sawn asunder, some were flayed with whips, some were blown from the mouths of mortars" (Browne, "Bábíism," in *Religious Systems of the World*, 348).

The Declaration of the Báb inaugurated a process whereby a clear break from Islam was publicly taking place in Persian society, posing an immediate threat to the authority of the religious establishment, thereby unleashing the fury of the clerics and the rage of the state, plunging the Bábí (and, later the Bahá'í) community into a cauldron of unrelenting torture and horrific death. This period of intense persecution and martyrdom steeled the resolve of the faithful believers and was noised far and wide, such that the religion, far from being extirpated, attracted broadcast interest and spread far beyond the borders of Persia to emerge—in its final form as the Bahá'í Faith—as the second-most widespread religion in the world today in terms of global diffusion (in all countries except North Korea and the Vatican, surpassed only by Christianity).

Bahá'u'lláh has revealed several Tablets commemorating the Declaration of the Báb. One of the most well known is the "Tablet of the Eternal Youth" (*Lawh-i Ghulámu'l Khuld*), which is composed partly in Arabic—in rhythmic, rhymed prose, with short verses alternating with refrains—and partly in Persian. Revealed during the Baghdad period of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry (1853–1863), this Tablet explicitly commemorates the Declaration of the Báb. According to Walbridge's description, the gates of Paradise open wide to reveal a Youth of Paradise, who symbolizes the Báb. Standing before the gaze of the concourse of heaven, all are dazzled by the beauty of this Youth. The gates of Paradise then open a second time, wherein a luminous Maiden of Heaven appears, who is the personification of the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. The denizens of heaven are awed by her beauty, by her song and by the lock of hair that slips from beneath her veil. She then stands before the Youth and lifts the veil from his face, whereupon the pillars of God's throne quake and tremble, and all creatures are struck dead. A celestial voice proclaims that the eyes of the ancients had longed to behold this Youth. The Youth then raises his eyes. With one word, he revives the spirits of the heavenly host. And by a single glance, the Youth restores the people of the earth—and then returns to Paradise. The Tablet closes in allegorical Persian, proclaiming to the peoples of the earth that the true morning of spiritual renewal has dawned, that the fire on Sinai is aflame once again, and that the celestial wine is flowing, for all to quaff. Ecstatic in tone, this Tablet appeals to all peoples to heed the call of the Báb, and hints of Bahá'u'lláh's own prophetic station as well. (Bahá'u'lláh

had not yet publicly declared that he was the Promised One foretold by the Báb.) The “Tablet of the Youth of Paradise” is melodically chanted at commemorations of the Declaration of the Báb and at other joyous occasions as well (Walbridge, *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*, 161–63).

The Declaration of the Báb, as previously mentioned, is observed in the evening of May 22, typically with readings and prayers as befit the occasion. Where Persian- and Arabic-speaking believers are gathered, the “Tablet of the Eternal Youth” (or another Bahá’í scripture revealed for this occasion) will be chanted. In a great many, if not most Bahá’í gatherings, Mullá Ḥusayn’s account, as recorded in Nabíl’s narrative, translated as *The Dawn-Breakers*, will be read, not as sacred scripture, but as sacred history. Prayers and readings are usually followed by refreshments and fellowship, and the rest of the holy day is observed as a day of rest from work during the day of May 23.

The two “Most Great Festivals” of the Bahá’í Faith are commemorations of the prophetic declarations of the “Twin Founders” of the Bahá’í Faith, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Concomitant with the growth and development of the Bahá’í community worldwide, the Declaration of the Báb will likely emerge, in time, as one of the great religious festivals of the world’s religions.

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See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Ascension of; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Báb, Martyrdom of the (July 9)

The yearly commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Báb is one of the nine major Bahá’í holy days on which work is suspended. Observed by Bahá’ís in the Middle East on 28 Sha‘bán—in accordance with the Islamic lunar calendar—the occasion is annually observed on July 9 throughout the rest of the Bahá’í world. For many participants, it is a deeply moving experience.

Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850)—known by his spiritual title as “the Báb” (“the Gate”) and regarded as the precursor and herald of Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, known as Bahá’u’lláh (the “Splendor” or “Glory of God,” 1817–1892)—was martyred on July 9, 1850, in Tabríz, Persia (now Iran). The circumstances of the Báb’s martyrdom, and its subsequent commemoration as a Bahá’í holy day, will be discussed below.

The Báb founded the 19th-century movement generally known as Bábism, an independent (albeit short-lived) religion that clearly broke from its parent religion, Persian (i.e., Twelver Shi‘i) Islam. As Orientalist Edward G. Browne observed regarding the Bábí phenomenon, “whatever its actual destiny may be, is of that stuff whereof world-religions are made.” As Browne predicted, the Bábí religion emerged as a “new world-religion” through its eventual transformation into what is now known as the Bahá’í Faith.

While the Bábí and Bahá’í religions are distinct, they are intimately related both historically and doctrinally. The writings of the Báb, for instance, are considered sacred scripture by all Bahá’ís. A number of the Báb’s religious laws were adopted and adapted by Bahá’u’lláh, as was the Badí‘ calendar (a solar calendar of

19 months of 19 days, each named after godly attributes to foster goodly virtues, which the Báb had created. Because the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are so historically and doctrinally related, they are actually called the “Twin Founders” of the Bahá'í Faith.

According to Armin Eschraghi, the Báb established a new, post-Islamic faith that fulfilled all the criteria of an independent religion. These include a new founder, newly revealed scriptures, a new set of metaphysical and theological teachings distinct from those of Islam, new religious laws and principles. In revealing his new code of laws, the *Persian Bayán* (1848), the Báb intended to pave the way for the advent of the Promised One; to provoke the clerical establishment and shatter the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority; and to prove the independence of his own religion as distinct from Islam.

The Báb declared that he was a messenger from God sent to proclaim the imminent advent of one greater than himself. Religious and state persecution fell upon his followers, leading to the torture and religious martyrdom of thousands. In July 1848, the Báb was summoned to Tabríz to stand trial before Muslim clerics. Ordered by Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, prime minister of Persia, the trial was doubtless intended to publicly discredit the Báb. Presiding over the trial was the young Crown Prince, who later became the reigning monarch of Persia, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. The Báb was pressured to recant his writings and claims.

Instead, the Báb openly proclaimed that he was the promised Qá'im, the expected deliverer in Shi'i Islam (and, as the Mahdí, by Sunni and Shi'i Muslims alike). To subject him to public ridicule by exposing his supposed ignorance, the Báb was then questioned about abstruse points of Arabic grammar, theology, and religious law. Throughout the course of the trial, the Báb staunchly refused to renounce his messianic claims and writings. After the trial reached its unsuccessful conclusion, the Báb was bastinadoed and again imprisoned. In their verdict, the clergy pronounced the Báb insane, thinking that a declaration of madness would quell the religious furor that the Báb had created.

However, a series of Bábí defensive clashes with the attacking state militias at Shaykh Tabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján persuaded the new prime minister Mírzá Taqí Khán that the unrest would endure unless the Báb was put to death. The prime minister therefore ordered the execution of the Báb, who was then brought to Tabríz. When, at the house of Mullá Muhammad Mamaqání, the Báb still would not recant his claims, a leader of the Tabríz Shaykhís, Mamaqání, issued the Báb's death warrant by public execution at an army barracks in Tabríz.

Imprisoned with the Báb in the barracks cell were his secretaries, the two brothers Siyyid Hasan and Siyyid Husayn Yazdí, along with a young Bábí mullá of Tabríz, Mírzá Muhammad-Alí Zunúzí, who was called Anís (“Companion”) by the Báb. Arrested for openly proclaiming the Báb's new religion, the young Anís refused to recant and so was sentenced to death with the Báb. The Báb chose Anís to die with him together as companion martyrs in a single execution, rather than in separate executions.

At noon, the Báb and Anís were brought out into the barracks square, and, bound by ropes, suspended from a spike driven into the wall of the barracks. The surrounding rooftops were thronged with an estimated 10,000 onlookers.

The Russian Armenian Sâm Khán commanded the Christian Bahádurán Regiment, which was ordered to carry out the execution. Although accounts of the Báb's execution vary in details, all agree that, after thick smoke—from the volley of 750 muskets—had cleared, the Báb had vanished, with Anís standing before the astonished multitude, unhurt. The Báb's escape from the first volley of musket fire is beyond doubt, as his ropes were cut by the shots. One witness to this extraordinary event, Sir Justin Shiel, Queen Victoria's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, in Tehran on July 22, 1850, records:

The founder of this sect has been executed at Tabreez. He was killed by a volley of musketry, and his death was on the point of giving his religion a lustre which would have largely increased his proselytes. When the smoke and dust cleared away after the volley, Báb was not to be seen, and the populace proclaimed that he had ascended to the skies. The balls had broken the ropes by which he was bound, but he was dragged from the recess where after some search he was discovered and shot. His death, according to the belief of his disciples, will make no difference as Báb must always exist. (Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 1844–1944, 78)

A frantic search ensued, and the Báb was found back in his cell, evidently completing dictation to his secretary that was earlier interrupted. Soldiers swiftly cleared the barracks square, and the Báb was once more suspended by ropes for execution, with Anís placed in front of the Báb. But Sâm Khán refused to order his troops to fire again and so the Muslim Nádirí Regiment was summoned. On the second attempt, the Báb and Anís were instantly killed. Their bodies, in fact, were fused together by the sheer number of bullets that struck them.

Despite the claims of some two dozen Bábís in their rival bids to succeed the Báb, the majority of his coreligionists, the Bábís, turned to Bahá'u'lláh, who effectively led the Bábí community until such time as he formally established the Bahá'í religion in 1863 by his announcement that he was the messianic figure the Báb foretold, although the designation “people of Bahá” (i.e., followers of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'ís), was not current until March 1866. In 1873, Bahá'u'lláh subsequently incorporated a number of the laws of the Báb, in modified form, in his book of laws, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (“The Most Holy Book”).

Although not one of the holy days mentioned in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the martyrdom of the Báb was observed by Bahá'u'lláh. Two practices are associated with the observance of the Martyrdom of the Báb. First, commemorations should take place at noon, the time of the Báb's execution. Second, the “Tablet of Visitation”—a special commemorative prayer—is usually recited. Typically, it is Nabíl's narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of the Báb that is read

on this occasion, although it is not a requirement to do so. Nabíl's narrative, which describes the prophetic passion of the Báb's martyrdom in detail and is based on eyewitness accounts, is remarkably objective in style, yet never fails to stir deep emotions in the hearts of participants in this solemnly commemorative holy day.

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See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Riḍván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Babaji Commemoration Day (July 25)

In his autobiography, Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) introduced his readers to a mysterious Indian saint known only as Mahavatar Babaji. Yogananda, one of the founders of Hinduism in North America, had been the student of Sri

Yuteswar (1855–1936), who had informed his young student that he had been sent to his guru by Mahavatar Babaji for a special purpose. Eventually, Yogananda would trace his own lineage as a teacher of kriya yoga back to Babaji, through Sri Yuteswar's guru, Lahiri Mahasaya (1828–1895).

Lahiri Mahasaya had met Mahavatar Babaji in 1861, under somewhat mysterious circumstances, but then proceeded to initiate him into kriya yoga and instructed him to pass it on. Lahiri had many meetings with Babaji and as he gathered students, many of them also met the mysterious teacher. Lahiri also wrote a number of books that mentioned his encounters with his teacher. One of his students, Sri Yukteswar, met Babaji in 1894 at the Kumbha Mela that gathered in Allahabad that year. He had two additional meetings with Babaji during his life, including one in the presence of Lahiri.

Yogananda learned of Babaji through his guru, but never met him. Though he and the other teachers in the lineage were grateful to Babaji for his teachings, they gained no knowledge of him personally, and facts such as his real name or date of birth were never learned. His unscheduled comings and goings further lent an aura of mystery and allowed a variety of speculations about Babaji to grow. He was said to already be some 500 years old by the end of the 19th century. Reports of meetings continued into the 1930s, by which time Yogananda was firmly settled in California.

Lahiri Mahasaya finely concluded Babaji was Lord Krishna, a view that was passed through the lineage to Yogananda and then to members of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) he founded. As he established holidays to remember and celebrate the gurus in the SRF lineage, Yogananda established July 25 as Babaji Commemoration Day. On that day, members of the SRF centers gather to honor Babaji, who they consider to have been an incarnation of the Hindu deity Krishna. As they gather, they follow a schedule of chanting, readings of texts concerning Babaji, and a liturgy, all designed to invoke Babaji's blessings. Attendees at the service are asked to bring a flower and an offering as symbols of their devotion and loyalty to the Self-Realization Fellowship and the SRF gurus.

Until the late 20th century, Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship were the exclusive source of knowledge of Babaji in the West. However, since the 1960s, a variety of groups and individuals have claimed alternative contacts with Babaji and are now propagating kriya yoga and claims about him quite apart from SRF, including claims that a teacher active in Haidakhan, India, between 1970 and 1982 was the same Babaji of whom Yogananda had written. The celebration of Babaji Commemoration Day, however, is limited to SRF and the Ananda Church of Self-Realization founded by Swami Kriyananda (Donald Waters, b. 1926) that grew from it.

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See also Kumbha Mela; Lahiri Mahasaya, Commemoration Days for; Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa; Yogananda, Mahasamadhi of.

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Baba's Day (January 18)

Baba's Day is celebrated annually by the members and friends of the Brahma Kumaris, an international Hindu organization based in India, in memory of the anniversary of the death of Lekhraj Kripilani (1876–1969), their founder, more popularly called Brahma Baba. Baba was the son of a village schoolmaster who as a young man married, became a businessman, and became well-to-do as a diamond trader. Though a philanthropist, he was not particularly religious until he had approached the age of retirement. He was 60 years old when he began to receive a set of visions and messages from the Hindu deity Shiva that offered a unique view of human existence, a more monotheistic view of Shiva and the traditional Hindu pantheon, and a vision of future global transformation. He withdrew from his business life and concentrated on responding to the visions and the new connection with the divine they had produced for the next 30 years. He passed away in 1969.

In 1937, he founded the Brahma Kumaris organization, a meditation (raja yoga)-based movement that spread across India and grew into an international organization with centers in some 100 countries. It has won accolades for its work on behalf of world peace, participation in various charitable causes, and its progressive views on the status and role of women. Baba left the Brahma Kumaris in the hands of a cadre of women. In 1950, the movement headquarters moved to Mount Abu, the highest peak in the Aravali Mountains of Rajasthan, where the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University was located.

On January 18, the members of the Brahma Kumaris invite people to participate in the World Meditation Hour, a time to focus on inner peace and healing for planet Earth, initially held in 1978. In the movement centers, a public World Meditation Hour program that includes music and talks on the meaning of the day are conducted. Members keep the entire day as a time for silence and meditation for world peace. The World Meditation Hour is held monthly at Brahma Kumaris centers, but in January it is tied to the anniversary of Baba's passing.

The Brahma Kumaris appeared in the West in the 1970s as one spectrum of Eastern new religions. It stood out because of the relationship it developed with the United Nations that formally acknowledged its Million Minutes for Peace project in 1987. It has not been without controversy, though criticism has been

mild compared to other similar groups. Much of the criticism grew from its advocacy of celibacy for its more committed full-time members.

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See also Avatar Adi Da Samraj's Birthday; Bhumanandaiji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Muktananda, Birthday of Swami Paramahansa.

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Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship

The Bahá'í calendar charts physical time, as do all calendrical systems, yet is additionally designed to inspire spiritual progress by associating time with the cultivation of human nobility. The precise name for the Bahá'í calendar is the Badí' (“Unique” or “Wondrous”) calendar. It originated with Sayyid 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), entitled the Báb (“the Gate”), who founded the Bábí religion, soon superseded by the Bahá'í Faith, established by Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí (1817–1892), known as Bahá'u'lláh (a spiritual title meaning the “Splendor [or “Glory”] of God”). By adopting and modifying the Badí' calendar for use by the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh gave it formal sanction.

Time is invested with spiritual significance by the naming of weekdays, days of the month, months, years, and cycles of years after godly perfections that can be translated into goodly virtues, such as “Beauty” (Jamál) “Knowledge” ('Ilm), “Honor” (Sharaf), and “Grandeur” ('Aẓamat), which are names of 4 of the 19 Bahá'í months. These dynamic “names of God” each highlight a distinctive quality of sterling character and human nobility, in a process of transformation that may, to coin the present author's term, be called *theophoric metamorphosis*. Literally, the term “theophoric,” as its Greek root indicates, means “God-bearing.” Here, the “names” of God may be conceived of as “qualities” or, better still, as “powers” of God that can be potentially manifested by man (and, to a lesser degree, by each created thing when it reaches its potential state of perfection).

In the Báb's *Kitáb al-Asmá'* (“Book of [Divine] Names”), which exceeds 3,000 pages and is said to be “the largest revealed book in sacred history,” the Báb treats human beings as reflections of divine names and attributes (Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 36). To the extent that a person is a “bearer” of one of the “names” (i.e., qualities or powers) of God, that individual is empowered to express that quality in human action. Through the progressive spiritualization of all persons—and, indeed, of all things—the Báb wished to transform all of reality into “mirrors” reflecting the perfections represented by these divine names.

Like other religious calendars, special holy days (such as the “Birth of the Báb” on October 20 and the “Birth of Bahá’u’lláh” on November 12) commemorate significant events in the history of the Bahá’í religion. These twin functions of meditation and commemoration combine to produce a means of reckoning and consecrating time in what is offered as a world calendar for future society, should all countries wish to adopt it.

The Báb established the Badí‘ calendar in several passages, particularly in the *Persian Bayán* 5:3, a volume he “revealed” (i.e., authored by divine revelation) around 1847, in which he stated:

The Lord of the universe hath fashioned all types of years by His behest, and hath ordained that . . . each year should equal the numerical value of the words “all things” (*kullu shay’*) [$19 \times 19 = 361$], to consist of nineteen months, where each month equalleth nineteen days, that from the moment of the rising of the sun in the vernal equinox—corresponding to the first sign of the Zodiac, the sign of Aries—till the end of its voyage at the end of winter—corresponding to the last sign of the Zodiac, the sign of Pisces—all beings may traverse through all the nineteen stages of the Letters of Unity.

The first month . . . resembleth the sun, while all other months resemble mirrors which reflect the radiant lights of that supreme month, in such wise that naught is seen in them but that month. God hath called that month the month of Bahá (Splendour, Glory), meaning that therein lieth the splendour and glory of all months, and He hath singled it out for Him Whom God shall make manifest. (Provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 327–28)

Here, “all things” (*kullu shay’*) “signifies the new spiritual community which comes into being out of the unity of the Báb and His Letters of the Living [first 18 disciples]” (Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 283).

Because the Báb’s style of discourse tends to be philosophically rarified and thus difficult to understand without the benefit of some explanation, a brief comment on the significance of the first month of the Badí‘ calendar will elucidate the position and preeminence of the name, “Bahá’.” The Báb singled out the word *váḥid* (unity) as a symbol for the oneness of God. In Arabic reckoning (*abjad*), the numerical value of “*váḥid*” (Arabic: *wāḥid*) is 19. Thus, the number 19 is a Bábí and Bahá’í symbol for the unity of God. Using the number 19 as the basis of the Badí‘ calendar, the Báb drew the names of the 19 months from the *Du‘á al-Sahar*, an Arabic invocatory prayer attributed to Imam Mḥammad al-Báqir (d. 732 CE), the fifth of the Twelver Shi‘i Imams, recited at dawn by Shi‘i Muslims during the Fast of Ramaḍan. Both the sixth Shi‘i Imam, Ja‘far al-Šádiq (d. 765 CE) and the eighth Shi‘i Imam, Riḍá’ (d. 818 CE), who transmitted this prayer, are said to have claimed that this dawn prayer contained the “Greatest Name” of God (*al-ism al-a‘zam*).

Bahá’u’lláh, in the Persian “Tablet of the Greatest Name,” cites the beginning of this dawn prayer, and observes that Muslims, despite the fact that certain Imams

indicated that the prayer contains the “Greatest Name” of God, remained oblivious to the positional preeminence of the word “Bahá’,” and thereby failed to divine this open secret. Instead of recognizing that Bahá’u’lláh was presaged in this prayer, several Shi’i clerics pronounced a death sentence on Bahá’u’lláh (which was never implemented).

The Báb specifically dedicates Naw-Rúz to “Him Whom God shall make manifest” (the promised messianic figure foretold by the Báb) and that, by naming the first day of each month of the Badí‘ calendar, “Bahá’,” and by naming the first month of each Badí‘ year, “Bahá’” (dedicated to “Him Whom God shall make manifest”), the Báb seems to imply that “Bahá’ ” (or Bahá’u’lláh) is this Promised One.

While the Báb’s theophoric naming conventions and system of aggregating years (i.e., tracking the spiritual names of weekdays, days of the month, months, and years within cycles of 19 and 361 years) remain intact in the Bahá’í Faith, the current practice is generally to simply number the years consecutively as the “Bahá’í Era” (“B.E.”) progresses. In Gregorian terms, the Bahá’í Era began on March 21, 1844. The Bahá’í epochal year of 1844 marks the year that the Báb founded the Bábí religion. Thus, 2010 is part of two consecutive Bahá’í years, in which the year 166 B.E. ended on March 20, 2010, and the new year, 167 B.E., commenced on March 21, 2010 (or, technically, on March 20, 2010, after sunset, since each new Bahá’í day begins after sunset).

The Badí‘ calendar is symmetrically composed of 19 months of 19 days, contemplatively named after divine attributes, with four (or, in a leap year, five) intercalary days, after the 18th month (in Bahá’u’lláh’s revision of the calendar) to round out the solar year. This calendrical symmetry is extended: not only are there 19 days per month and 19 months per year, but 19 years per cycle, and 19 cycles per major cycle, while conserving the traditional seven-day week (signaling a willingness to accommodate the calendrical needs of the older religions in a religiously plural society), where Friday is evidently designated as a day of rest, although this is not yet officially practiced in the Bahá’í religion.

The Bahá’í calendar is solar and, in terms of its yearly renewal, seasonal. The Bahá’í New Year is synchronized with the first day of spring (i.e., the vernal equinox) and, not surprisingly, is called “Naw-Rúz,” a Persian expression that literally means “New Day.” The day of Naw-Rúz is the first of nine Bahá’í holy days in which work is to be suspended.

Naw-Rúz is astronomically fixed. Bahá’u’lláh directed that this feast day be celebrated on whichever day the sun passes into the constellation of Aries, even if this occurs one minute before sunset. Due to the “equinox wobble” of 3.2 days, astronomically, Naw-Rúz could fall on March 19, 20, 21, or 22, depending on the time of the equinox. It is anticipated that the timing of Naw-Rúz will require the choice of a fixed location on earth, which will serve as the standard for the precise determination of the spring equinox. As with a number of other issues affecting the Bahá’í calendar, this matter will be resolved in due course by the Universal House of Justice, the elected international Bahá’í governing council. For now, the

Bahá'í New Year is celebrated on March 21 in the Occident, whereas in the Orient, including Iran and the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa/Akká, the day of Naw-Rúz is determined on the basis of the true astronomical vernal equinox.

Besides its special designation as the “New Day,” March 21, 2010, for instance, in the ennobling naming conventions of the Badí‘ calendar, may be “read” in the following manner: This is the weekday of “Beauty” (*Jamál*, i.e., Sunday), the (first) day “Splendor” (*Bahá'*) in the (first) month of “Splendor” (*Bahá'*; names of days and months follow the same progression) in the (15th) year of “Affection” (*Vidád*), in the cycle (*Váḥid*) of the first Grand Cycle (Arabic: *Kullu Shay'*, Persian: *Kull-i-Shay'*).

Arranged in historical order, the nine Bahá'í holy days recapitulate the origins and history of the Bahá'í religion. With the exception of Naw-Rúz (which metaphorically represents springtime renewal, both in its physical and its metaphysical sense), the Bahá'í Holy Days are annual commemorations of significant milestones in the formative era of Bábí and Bahá'í history:

1. Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (November 12, 1817).
2. Birth of the Báb (October 20, 1819).
3. Naw-Rúz (March 21, 1844).
4. Declaration of the Báb (May 23, 1844).
5. Martyrdom of the Báb (July 9, 1850).
6. First Day of Riḍván (April 21, 1863).
7. Ninth Day of Riḍván (April 29, 1863).
8. Twelfth Day of Riḍván (May 2, 1863).
9. Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (May 29, 1892).

Taken together, the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh are referred to as the “Twin Holy Birthdays” since, in the Hegira (Muslim) lunar calendar, these fall on consecutive days: The birth of the Báb was on the first day of the month of Muḥarram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the prior birth of Bahá'u'lláh fell on the second day of Muḥarram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817). Whether the Twin Holy Birthdays are to be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis will later be determined by the Universal House of Justice. For now, they are observed on a solar basis in most Bahá'í communities worldwide.

There is a religiously “seasonal” aspect as well, since the Bahá'í calendar sets apart 19 days, from March 2 to 20, for fasting from sunrise to sunset. The Badí‘ calendar further regulates the rhythm of Bahá'í community life in establishing the dates for the Nineteen-Day Feast, in which each local Bahá'í community gathers for the purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship. Given its spiritual, administrative, and social functions, the Bahá'í “Nineteen-Day Feast” is the heart of Bahá'í communal worship and community building in each Bahá'í locality.

Each Bahá'í “Feast” (from the Latin *festus*, or “joyous”; the Arabic term is *díyáfat*, which derives from a root word for “hospitality”) typically takes place on the first day of the Bahá'í month. Here, the theophoric calendrical names take on their greatest significance, as reflected in the names of the 19 Bahá'í feasts, which are named after the Bahá'í months in which they respectively fall. These are:

Bahá'í Calendar Table

1.	Bahá'	Splendor	March 21
2.	Jalál	Glory	April 9
3.	Jamál	Beauty	April 28
4.	'Aẓamat	Grandeur	May 17
5.	Núr	Light	June 5
6.	Raḥmat	Mercy	June 24
7.	Kalimát	Words	July 13
8.	Kamál	Perfection	August 1
9.	Asmá'	Names	August 20
10.	'Izzat	Might	September 8
11.	Mashíyyat	Will	September 27
12.	'Ilm	Knowledge	October 16
13.	Qudrat	Power	November 4
14.	Qawl	Speech	November 23
15.	Masá'il	Questions	December 12
16.	Sharaf	Honor	December 31
17.	Sulṭán	Sovereignty	January 19
18.	Mulk	Dominion	February 7
	Ayyám-i-Há'	Intercalary Days	February 26
19.	'Alá'	Loftiness	March 2 (Bahá'í Fast)

These “names of God” may not only be invoked, but they may be evoked. According to Bahá'u'lláh, these “names” of God may be reflected as human perfections (to the degree humanly possible), like a polished mirror:

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. . . . Upon the reality of man, . . . He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 65)

Reflecting divine attributes, however, requires divine assistance, for not until “the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory” (Ibid., 66) This divine assistance is brought by the wisdom and inspiration of the “Manifestations of God” (Prophets or Messengers of God), as Bahá'u'lláh further explains:

Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They [Manifestations of God] are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts. (Ibid., 67)

The mere fact that the name of a given Bahá'í month is a godly quality that can be acquired as a human virtue does not, alone, accomplish that result. No burst of insight will emanate from the simple recitation of, say, "Grandeur." Meditating on a virtue and then manifesting it is part and parcel of Bahá'í self-transformation. In many Bahá'í feasts, the devotional prayers and readings are often focused on the name of the Bahá'í month as a "theme," although there is certainly no requirement to do so.

Take, for example, the attribute of "Generosity," which is the name of one of the years. (*Jád*; idiosyncratic construction of the Arabic *jūd*), for instance, which appears as the eighth year in the cycle of 19 years, called a "Unity" (*Váhid*). In the Persian Hidden Words (no. 49), Bahá'u'lláh states that giving to the poor is a human expression of divine generosity:

O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 39)

While not directly related to the calendar, the idea that the divine names have a transformative potential can be seen in this passage from the *Persian Bayán* 5:4:

For the divine Cycle advanceth in stages, until such Revelation when all things will be called by the names of God, such that no name will be assigned to anything unless it resembleth one of the names of God, glorified and exalted is He. . . . This will occur gradually and in stages, until all heaven, earth, and that which lieth between them, will be filled with the names of God. . . . Well is it with the people of that age who call nothing but by a name of God. That age is worthy to be praised as the beginning of the worlds of paradise! (Provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 334)

Bahá'u'lláh explains that God is sanctified above all attributes and "names." Therefore, any and all references to the "names of God" apply to the "Manifestations of God" (i.e., Messengers of God, or Prophets), as Bahá'u'lláh states in

the *Gems of Divine Mysteries*: “Thus hath He revealed these most excellent names and most exalted words in the Manifestations of His Self and the Mirrors of His Being. It is therefore established that all names and attributes return unto these sublime and sanctified Luminaries” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, 35).

These “stages” of transformation, of which the Báb speaks, involve a process that may be termed *theophoric metamorphosis* (previously defined at the beginning of this article). Beyond the contemplative life, so classically modeled by monks and mendicants in cloistered isolation, the various names of God must be effectively “translated” from the realm of ideals into the arena of social action in order for a transformation to take place. (In fact, Bahá'u'lláh prohibited monasticism in this day and age.) As a result, the individual is transformed to the degree that society is transformed as a result of that act, and vice versa. This may be illustrated as follows:

By contemplating and “translating” the name “Light” (the name of the fifth Bahá'í month) into a personal virtue for the social commonweal, an individual may conceive of a way to enlighten others. By meditating on the name, “Knowledge” (the name of the 12th Bahá'í month) and then manifesting that attribute in action, a person may impart insight or information to others, which will benefit them. In the same vein, by reflecting deeply, then acting on the divine name, “Mercy” (the name of the sixth Bahá'í month), one may elect to perform a singular deed of “mercy” or kindness by ministering to the sick, poor, or otherwise disadvantaged members of society. Here, a godly “name” is effectively expressed as a goodly action. The Bahá'í calendar not only charts the march of time, but addresses the quality of time by synergistically inspiring the progress of soul and society.

There are certain “mystical”—that is, symbolic—aspects to the Badí'/Bahá'í calendar as well, but these more recondite features of the calendar are beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that the Bahá'í calendar, by charting physical time and associating time with divine perfections translatable as human virtues, not only quantitatively measures a given point in time, but qualitatively measures the progress of the soul in relation to the social moment. Thus, the theophoric (“God bearing”) nature of the calendar, in theory, becomes theomorphic (“God manifesting”) in practice, whereby the Bahá'í calendar may prospectively live up to its name, Badí' (“Wondrous”).

Christopher Buck and J. Gordon Melton

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Nowruz; Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; Spring Equinox (Vernal); World Religion Day.

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■ Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith arose from the Bábí Faith, a religion that briefly flourished in Iran in the 1840s. It was established by 'Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), who in 1844 took on the title of *the Báb* ("the Gate") and who declared himself to be the fulfillment of Islamic prophecies. The Twelver Shi'a Islam that dominates Iran expected the return of the Twelfth Imam (a messianic figure), and the expectation peaked among some Shi'ites in 1844. The Báb initially hinted that he was merely a gate to the Twelfth Imam, but gradually made explicit a claim to be the Twelfth Imam himself. He also penned mystic commentaries on the Qur'an, whose style and content signified a claim to divine revelation.

Among the early converts to the Bábí movement was Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, a nobleman born in northern Iran whose father was a palace official. As the Bábí leadership was executed, one after another, his role in the movement grew in importance. In the summer of 1848, he assembled a gathering of the remaining Bábí leaders at which he gave each a title; he took on the title of Bahá'u'lláh (the glory of God), one subsequently endorsed by the Báb. Before his execution, the Báb recognized Bahá'u'lláh's teenage half-brother Yahyá (1831–1912) as a figure-head leader of the Bábí community, though he gave Yahyá no explicit authority. Considering that Yahyá was completely unknown in the Bábí community and

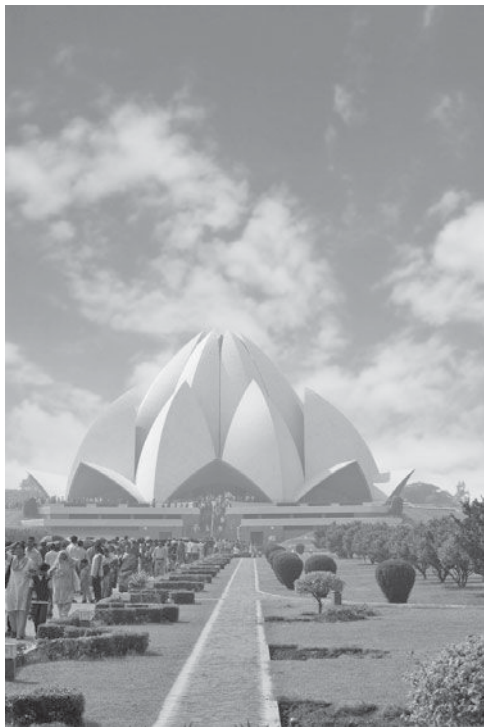
was still a youth living in Bahá'u'lláh's household, the appointment was probably made to allow Bahá'u'lláh to run the Bábí movement with a minimum of government interference.

In August 1852, a group of Bábís attempted to assassinate the king, resulting in a severe government-sponsored pogrom against the remaining Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and imprisoned for four months. When the Iranian government released Bahá'u'lláh from prison, they banished him from Iran. Hence he departed for Baghdad, a city in the Ottoman Empire frequented by many Iranians intent on performing pilgrimage to the Shi'ite shrines nearby.

The next 10 years were highly productive ones, in which Bahá'u'lláh penned several of his most important works: *The Hidden Words* (a collection of ethical and mystical aphorisms), *The Seven Valleys and Four Valleys* (two works about the mystic journey of the soul, in dialogue with Sufi concepts), and the *Book of Certitude* (a work delineating basic theological concepts and principles of personal spiritual development through commentary on passages from the Bible and Qur'an). His efforts to revitalize the Bábí community of Baghdad and to revive the Iranian Bábí community were so successful that the Iranian government requested that the Ottomans move him farther from Iran. On the eve of his departure for Istanbul, in April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh publicly declared to his companions and close associates that he was the prophetic teacher the Báb had prophesied.

The latter work specified that upon Bahá'u'lláh's passing, his eldest son, 'Abbás, was to become his successor; other tablets praised 'Abbás as the exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the official interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Consequently, when Bahá'u'lláh passed in 1892, at age 75, 'Abbás, age 48, was quickly acknowledged by all as the rightful head of the Bahá'í Faith. He took the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, meaning servant of Bahá, to underline his subservience to his father's legacy. An attempt by one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brothers to form a rival Bahá'í movement garnered virtually no support and died out, though it did cause Ottoman officials to look at all Bahá'ís with suspicion and to renew 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement within the city of Acre. The decade of confinement ended in 1908, when the Young Turks Revolution toppled the Ottoman sultan and converted Turkey into a secular republic.

From 1892 to 1908, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was free to receive visitors and communications, including cablegrams. The spread of the Bahá'í Faith to the United States and subsequently to Europe, Hawaii, Australia, and Japan resulted in a diverse group of pilgrims entering Acre—still a prison city—to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá and receive his wisdom. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement permanently ended in 1908, he considered travel. In 1910, he visited Egypt, and in 1911, he traveled to Europe to meet and encourage that continent's fledgling Bahá'í communities. In 1912, he traveled to North America, arriving in early April. He left North America in December 1912, spending the winter and spring in Europe before returning to



A lotus-shaped Bahá'í temple in Delhi, India.
(Arvindimg/Dreamstime.com)

Palestine months before the beginning of World War I. He passed away in November 1921 at age 77.

Like his father, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a will, in which he named his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, to be his successor and *valí amru'lláh* (Guardian of the Cause of God). As a result, aside from a few small efforts to split the Bahá'í community (none of which garnered more than a few hundred followers or lasted more than a generation), the Bahá'ís unitedly accepted Shoghi Effendi as their new head. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will also specified the system whereby Bahá'ís would elect nine-member local spiritual assemblies (governing councils of local Bahá'í communities) and delegates who would elect nine-member national spiritual assemblies. The will also specified that the members of all national spiritual assemblies

would serve as the delegates to elect the Universal House of Justice, the supreme worldwide Bahá'í governing body. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will asserted that while the Guardian had the power to interpret authoritative Bahá'í texts, the Universal House of Justice had the authority to legislate on matters about which the texts were silent.

Shoghi Effendi's sudden death, without a will, in November 1957 plunged the Bahá'í world community into a crisis, because it deprived the community of its international leadership and raised the specter of schism. But Shoghi Effendi had begun a 10-year plan for expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in 1953 that provided the Bahá'ís with clear goals until April 1963. He had also appointed a series of individuals as *Hands of the Cause of God* (a position created by Bahá'u'lláh). In October 1957, he raised their total number to 27 and termed them "the Chief Stewards of Baha'u'llah's embryonic World Commonwealth, who have been invested by the unerring Pen of the Center of His Covenant with the dual function of guarding over the security, and of insuring the propagation, of His Father's Faith" (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, 127). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will had also given the Hands clear authority. Consequently the Bahá'ís of the world turned to the Hands, who coordinated the Bahá'í Faith until the completion of Shoghi Effendi's 10-year teaching plan. One effort by a Hand of the Cause, Charles Mason Remey, to claim leadership of the Bahá'í community garnered support

from several hundred persons, but subsequently the Remeyite movement split into at least four factions.

In April 1963 the Hands oversaw the election of the Universal House of Justice, from membership in which they voluntarily disqualified themselves. Subsequently the Universal House of Justice has been elected every five years by the members of all the national spiritual assemblies, who either send their ballots by mail, or gather in Haifa, Israel, to cast their ballots in person. The Universal House of Justice has overseen continued expansion of the Bahá'í community and coordinated translation of more Bahá'í texts into English and other languages (including the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*); it was also responsible for a great increase in the public visibility of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide.

In 1888, two Lebanese Christians became Bahá'ís in Egypt and, in 1892, immigrated to the United States. One of them, Ibrahim George Kheiralla (1849–1929), was responsible for converting the first Americans in 1894. From a small group in Chicago, by 1900 the United States had four Bahá'í communities of 50 or more believers, plus scattered Bahá'ís in 23 states. By 1899, the Faith was also introduced from Chicago to Ontario, Canada; Paris, France; and London, England. A convert in Europe in turn took the Bahá'í Faith to Hawaii in 1901, and two Hawaiian Bahá'ís took it to Japan in 1914. In 1910, a pair of American Bahá'ís circled the globe westward, visiting major Bahá'í communities in every country where the religion could be found. By 1921, other American Bahá'ís had settled in Mexico, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was so impressed by the American Bahá'í community that he sent them a series of 14 tablets from 1914 to 1916 entitled *The Tablets of the Divine Plan*, in which he enjoined them to spread the Bahá'í religion to every nation and island on the globe. He enumerated hundreds of places where there should be Bahá'í communities, all of which subsequently became missionary goals. In the 1920s, Shoghi Effendi gave the American Bahá'ís the chief responsibility for establishing Bahá'í-elected institutions, and he patterned such bodies in Europe, Asia, and Australasia on the American model.

In 1937, the North American Bahá'ís having finally established firm local and national spiritual assemblies, Shoghi Effendi gave them a Seven Year Plan (1937–1944) calling for them to establish at least one local spiritual assembly in every state in the United States and one in every province of Canada, to establish the Bahá'í Faith in every country in Latin America, and to complete the exterior of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. In spite of World War II, every goal was achieved, and many Latin American nations had local spiritual assemblies as well as small groups of Bahá'ís in 1944.

In 1946, Shoghi Effendi launched a second Seven Year Plan (1946–1953) that called for creation of a separate national spiritual assembly for Canada (the Canadian Bahá'ís having shared a national assembly with the United States all that time), a single national spiritual assembly for all of South America, another for all of Central America, and reestablishment of the Bahá'í Faith in war-ravaged western Europe.

By 1953, there were 12 national spiritual assemblies worldwide: one in Italy and Switzerland, one in Germany and Austria, one in Egypt and Sudan, one in Australia and New Zealand, one in India and Burma, the four aforementioned in the Americas, the United Kingdom, Iran, and Iraq. Shoghi Effendi gave plans to all 12 of them for the period 1953–1963. Among the goals were to more than double the number of countries, islands, and significant territories in which the Bahá'í Faith was established and to raise the number of national spiritual assemblies to 57. Except for a national spiritual assembly in one Islamic country, all the goals were achieved by 1963. The United States achieved perhaps a third of the goals, while expanding the number of American Bahá'ís from 7,000 to 10,000.

The decade 1963–1973 saw the fruits of the effort to spread the Bahá'í Faith widely but very thinly around the world. Latin American Bahá'ís settling in Bolivia reached out to the rural population, and tens of thousands became Bahá'ís; the Bolivian Bahá'í community is still the largest in Latin America, with a university and a radio station to serve its members and the citizenry. In the United States, door-to-door teaching brought 10,000 to 15,000 rural African Americans into the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia in the years 1969–1972. At the same time, an unusual receptivity swept the college population, no doubt stimulated by the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. By 1974, the United States had 60,000 Bahá'ís. Subsequent conversion has been supplemented by immigration (some 12,000 Iranian Bahá'ís and perhaps 10,000 Southeast Asian Bahá'ís have settled in the United States since 1975), with the result that in 2001, the United States had 142,000 Bahá'ís and nearly 1,200 local spiritual assemblies. Now more than a century old, the American Bahá'í community is an indigenous American religion, with fifth- and sixth-generation members.

Beliefs and Practices

The Bahá'í Faith possesses authoritative texts from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. In all cases, a sharp distinction is made between written and oral statements by the head of the Faith: the former are binding if they can be authenticated; the latter are not binding unless they were committed to writing and subsequently approved by the head of the Faith.

The authoritative texts also are hierarchically ranked in importance. Those by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are the most important, because both individuals are considered Manifestations of God and thus were mouthpieces of divine revelation. Their writings are considered the word of God. Because Bahá'u'lláh often abrogated specific laws of the Báb, the latter are not binding on Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not considered a Manifestation of God, but his writings come from an individual whose spiritual rank is considered unique in human history (above that of an ordinary human being but below that of a Manifestation); hence his writings possess a sacredness and are considered part of Bahá'í scripture. Shoghi Effendi, on the other hand, occupies a rank even further from that of a Manifestation, and

his writings, though binding and authoritative, occupy a less sacred place in the hierarchy of Bahá'í scripture. The writings of the Universal House of Justice are also binding and authoritative but, like papal encyclicals, would not be considered scripture.

Bahá'í teachings are often summarized as the unity of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of humankind. If one adds teachings about the creation of a Bahá'í community and about the personal spiritual life, one has a useful division of Bahá'í teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh describes God as an unknowable essence—in other words, that ultimately God is beyond human ken and reckoning. Bahá'u'lláh's view, however, is not that humans can know nothing about God; on the contrary, even though the divine has an unknowable essence, it also has attributes such as mercy, justice, love, patience, self-subsistence, might, and knowledge that we can experience and know. By developing these qualities in their own souls, humans guide and foster their personal spiritual development and prepare themselves for the next life, in which spiritual growth occurs continuously and primarily through God's grace. Experiencing God's attributes in creation is the basis of nature mysticism; Bahá'u'lláh says that all created things reflect divine attributes (a concept that is also fundamental to Bahá'í environmental ethics). Bahá'u'lláh notes, however, that the perfect reflector of divine attributes on this plane of existence is the Manifestation of God, a rare figure who receives divine revelation and guidance and manifests them perfectly in the language of his/her culture and through his/her own life and actions. In an epistemological sense, the manifestation *is* God, because in the mortal plane, she or he is the only perfect source of knowledge of the divine. Bahá'u'lláh identifies Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Zoroaster, the Báb, and himself as Manifestations and suggests that Adam, Noah, the founder of the Sabaeen religion, Salih, and Hud were also Manifestations (the last three are figures mentioned in the Qur'an as well). To this list, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds Buddha and Shoghi Effendi adds Krishna, raising the total to 14. Bahá'u'lláh also states that many Manifestations lived so long ago that their names have been lost; 'Abdu'l-Bahá stresses that humanity has always received divine guidance through Manifestations.

The Bahá'í recognition that the majority of the world's major religions were established by Manifestations is the basis of the Bahá'í concept of the unity of religion. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá both state that all religions are based on a divine revelation (either directly or by borrowing divine ideas from previous religions) but add that, while all religions share certain basic ethical and metaphysical principles, they also differ because the revelation had to be tailored to the social and cultural context in which it was expressed. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá also criticize the learned and clergy of all religions for misunderstanding and distorting the original teachings. The bewildering diversity of the world's religions—especially in ritual and practice—is attributed to differing cultural contexts and interpretations. Bahá'í scholars have just begun to research issues that arise from the

Bahá'í approach to religion, such as the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to Buddhism (which fits the Bahá'í model of a religion the least), and to Sikhism, Jainism, and Chinese religions (which have no Manifestations recognized by the Bahá'í Faith). Interfaith dialogue is also affected by the Bahá'í concept of Manifestation, for it implies that the latest Manifestation—Bahá'u'lláh—is in some sense the most important. Bahá'u'lláh states that God will continue to send Manifestations to humanity in the future, but the next one will come only after the lapse of a thousand years (which is the time given the Bahá'í Faith to develop itself and mature).

Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that human beings are the “waves of one sea,” “the leaves of one branch,” and “the flowers of one garden,” images that emphasize the overriding unity of all human beings. Shoghi Effendi notes that the oneness of humankind is the watchword and pivot of the Bahá'í teachings. Although this teaching can be seen as similar to Paul's words that Christians are “baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (KJV, I Cor. 12:13), Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá strongly emphasized the implications of this principle: that all persons are equal before God and therefore must have basic equality in human society; that men and women are equal; that races are equal and must be reconciled and united. In his visit to the United States in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá insisted on all Bahá'í meetings being open to blacks as well as whites and encouraged an African American man, Louis Gregory, to marry an English woman, Louise Matthew. American Bahá'í communities began the struggle to integrate themselves ethnically and racially as early as 1908, and women were first elected to Bahá'í local and national governing bodies as early as 1907 (in 2001, they constitute the majority of the membership of American local spiritual assemblies and four-ninths of the membership of the national spiritual assembly).

In addition to its implications of unity, the oneness of humanity also is understood to imply the need to establish a global governing system. Bahá'u'lláh called on all kings and rulers to end war, limit armaments, and meet in an international summit to establish common treaties and institutions. He said that an international language and script should be selected to supplement local languages and allow easy world communication. The Bahá'í texts also call for an international system of weights and measures, a world currency, an elected world legislature, an international collective security arrangement, and global measures to ensure universal education and health care, to create equitable access to resources, and to diminish the extreme imbalances of wealth and poverty. Indeed, the Bahá'í authoritative texts include an extensive critique of existing social norms and a vision for creating a just, unified world.

The Bahá'í community consists of all persons who have accepted Bahá'u'lláh and have requested membership in the body of his followers. It is conceived of as an evolving entity destined to reflect Bahá'u'lláh's teachings ever more perfectly and to embrace an ever-larger segment of humanity. The chief goal of the Bahá'í community is to achieve ever-greater unity.

Bahá'ís strive for spiritual unity through various means. Bahá'í gatherings begin with prayer. Discussion about any matter is conducted according to the principles of consultation, whereby individuals are encouraged to be frank but tactful in expressing themselves; should listen carefully and avoid offending or feeling offended by others; where ideas, once expressed, belong to the group and thus can be modified or rejected by all present, including the person first proposing the idea; where decisions ideally should be unanimous, but can be carried by a majority; and where the results of consultation must be trusted and not undermined by subsequent dissent, noncooperation, or backbiting. Consultation is simultaneously a set of principles of behavior, a collection of attitudes toward people and ideas, and a culture of discourse to model and perfect.

In addition to the Bahá'í governing institutions, the Bahá'í texts describe the creation and development of Bahá'í communities. Bahá'í community life centers on the institution of the feast, a gathering once every Bahá'í month (which lasts 19 days) wherein the Bahá'ís worship together, consult on local community activities, and socialize. The feast also provides the principal opportunity for local spiritual assemblies to share their ideas and plans and receive feedback from the local members. In addition to feasts, Bahá'ís attend firesides (gatherings, usually in people's homes, to introduce the Bahá'í Faith to others), deepenings (meetings to study Bahá'í texts and principles together), children's classes (the equivalent of Sunday school), adult classes, and devotional meetings (sometimes held weekly on Sundays). Particularly important are Bahá'í holy days, nine of which are observed every year.

No account of Bahá'í teachings would be complete without an exploration of the devotional life of the individual. The Bahá'í scriptures state that the purpose of life is “to know and worship” God and to “carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,” thus embracing both a vertical relationship with one's Creator and a horizontal relationship with one's fellow humans. Rather than stress an instant of personal salvation, like some Christian groups, or a moment of enlightenment, like some Buddhist groups, the Bahá'í scriptures stress ongoing personal transformation, based on internalization of the Bahá'í revelation and its expression in service to others. Bahá'u'lláh called on Bahá'ís to build their prayer life on the pillar of daily obligatory prayer; he gave three prayers among which Bahá'ís choose one to say daily. (Bahá'ís also can choose among hundreds of prayers penned by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on a variety of subjects, such as forgiveness, assistance, healing, and grief; they rarely pray spontaneously in their own words.) Bahá'u'lláh ordained the repeating of the phrase *Alláh-u-Abhá* (God Is Most Glorious) 95 times each day as the basis for one's meditative and contemplative life. He established a period of fasting (from sunrise to sunset, for 19 days from March 2 through March 20; in that period, Bahá'ís abstain from eating, drinking, and tobacco) as a mild ascetic practice, granting exceptions to those under age 15; over age 70; the ill; travelers; women who are pregnant, menstruating, or nursing; and anyone performing heavy labor. He enjoined the practice of

reciting the word of God twice daily in order to connect the believer to the revelation.

The horizontal dimension of the devotional life has various aspects. Bahá'u'lláh says Bahá'ís should be “anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements” (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, selection CVI). Bahá'ís are thus encouraged, individually and collectively, to improve the world around them.

Robert Stockman

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Nowruz; Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Bahá'í Fast (March 2–20)

Most world religions include the practice of fasting, and many include times of community-wide fasting. The Bahá'í Faith has such a period of communal fasting that occurs each March 2–20. The Fast follows Ayyám-i-Há, the Bahá'í Intercalary Days, and is itself followed by the Festival of Naw-Rúz.

The Fast was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and elaborated on by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), the eldest son, and the successor and interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh. During the 19-day fast, the believer abstains from food and drink from sunrise to sunset, and remains mindful of God

and of the divine purpose for human existence. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá extolled the virtue of the Fast:

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, II)

Verily, I say, fasting is the supreme remedy and the most great healing for the disease of self and passion. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, XVII)

This Fast leadeth to the cleansing of the soul from all selfish desires, the acquisition of spiritual attributes, attraction to the breezes of the All-Merciful, and enkindlement with the fire of divine love. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, XXVI)

Fasting is binding on men and women from the age of spiritual maturity (15 years). Those exempt from the requirement of fasting include, *inter alia*: (1) travelers, if the journey exceeds nine hours; (2) those traveling on foot, if the journey is over two hours; (3) those who are ill; (4) those over 70; (5) women who are pregnant; (6) nursing mothers; (7) women in their menses; (8) those engaged in heavy labor.

Foregoing earthly appetites helps one acquire godly attributes. There are benefits for the Bahá'í community as well, in that collective participation in the fast deepens solidarity.

Special prayers have been revealed for the fast. Some are quite poetic and laden with metaphors of devotion and transformation. One example is this excerpt from a prayer by Bahá'u'lláh:

I beseech Thee, O my God, by that Letter which, as soon as it proceeded out of the mouth of Thy will, hath caused the oceans to surge, and the winds to blow, and the fruits to be revealed, and the trees to spring forth, and all past traces to vanish, and all veils to be rent asunder, and them who are devoted to Thee to hasten unto the light of the countenance of their Lord, the Unconstrained, to make known unto me what lay hid in the treasures of Thy knowledge and concealed within the repositories of Thy wisdom. Thou seest me, O my God, holding to Thy Name, the Most Holy, the Most Luminous, the Most Mighty, the Most Great, the Most Exalted, the Most Glorious, and clinging to the hem of the robe to which have clung all in this world and in the world to come. (*Bahá'í Prayers*, 242–43)

Fasting from food is a point of departure for spiritual development, where one progresses, for example, to a state where one fasts from even the desire for food,

or even the thought of food, and focuses instead on nearness to God, expressed through prayer and meditation, and service to others. The ultimate fasting is abstaining from passions of the self to become more compassionate toward others. The nineteen-day Bahá'í Fast, therefore, is an ideal preparation for the Bahá'í New Year (Naw-Rúz, lit. “New Day”) that immediately follows the Fast, when the vernal equinox heralds a new springtime of personal and social renewal, both physical and spiritual.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Fast of Gedaliah; Fast of the First Born; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of (May 29)

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, is a solemn occasion commemorated by Bahá'ís worldwide at 3:00 a.m. on May 29 annually. It is one of the nine major Bahá'í holy days, on which work is to be suspended. Shortly before dawn, Bahá'u'lláh passed away at 3:00 a.m. on May 29, 1892 in the Mansion of Bahjí (Arabic, “delight”), near ‘Akká in Palestine (now Israel). Local Bahá'í communities worldwide therefore gather at that time (3:00 a.m.) to commemorate their founder with Bahá'í prayers and scriptures, usually culminating in the chanting in Arabic, or recitation in translation, of what is known as the “Tablet of Visitation,” a special prayer reserved for the commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the Báb.

A telegram bearing the news, “The Sun of Bahá’ has set,” was immediately dispatched by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and successor), to Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd, with a request for permission to bury Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, which was granted. Bahá'u'lláh was interred shortly after sunset, on the very day of his ascension.

Where the sacred remains of Bahá'u'lláh are interred is now known as the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh—a building that, in 2008, was designated a UNESCO World

Heritage Site along with the Shrine of the Báb, making these two Bahá'í sacred sites the first modern religious edifices to be so distinguished. By virtue of their outstanding value to humanity, World Heritage Sites belong to all the peoples of the world.

Of far greater moment, however, is Bahá'u'lláh's contribution to a future world heritage of global unity and world peace, culminating in a golden age envisioned and promised by Bahá'u'lláh himself. One example of this promise appears in Cambridge scholar Edward Granville Browne's historic meeting with Bahá'u'lláh, in 1890:

Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. . . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations. . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come. . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. (Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, xl)

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the appointed “Centre of the Covenant” (successor to Bahá'u'lláh), pursuant to provisions of Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book and the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (“Book of the Covenant”), which is Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament, written entirely in his own hand. Nine days after Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, this singularly important document was shown to the local Bahá'ís and read in their presence. The passage conferring successorship upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá is as follows:

The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” The object of this sacred Verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ['Abdu'l-Bahá]. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 221)

Significantly, the text of this document was made available to the scholarly community by Russian orientalist Aleksandr Toumansky (1861–1920), who published the original Persian text, along with a Russian translation. At the same time, Toumansky also published a poem, “Lament,” by the acclaimed Bahá'í poet, Mírzá 'Alí-Ashraf Láhijání, known as “ ‘Andalib” (the “Nightingale”) who writes, in part:

Today the cupbearer, by God's design,
 poured bile into the cup of life, not wine. . . .
 Through Him the Day of Resurrection dawned:
 Now earth quakes at the setting of His Sun. . . .
 We'll never hear His voice again, but there
 the Nightingale of Paradise flies free. (Translated by Ahang Rabbani and
 Anthony Lee, in Momen, *Bahá'u'llah: A Short Biography*, 154–55)

Throughout the world's religious history, the death of the founder has typically precipitated a crisis over succession. The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, however, was immediately followed by the succession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as leader of the Bahá'í community, as authorized "Interpreter" of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, and as the "Perfect Exemplar" of Bahá'í virtues. This clear transition, ordained in Bahá'u'lláh's written testament, preserved the integrity of the Bahá'í community and protected it from the perils of schism.

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the global Bahá'í community, declared the period from April 1992 to April 1993 as the second "Bahá'í Holy Year" to mark both the centenary itself and the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh in November 1892. On May 29, 1992, the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing, several thousand Bahá'ís from more than 200 countries gathered to pay homage to Bahá'u'lláh at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, which is adjacent to the Mansion of Bahjí, located near Old Acre on Israel's northern coast.

Some Bahá'ís arrange, through the Office of Pilgrimage at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, to schedule their pilgrimages around the time of the Birth or Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. During their pilgrimage, Bahá'ís visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. In commemorating the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís worldwide transport themselves, in mind and heart, to the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh, in what may be thought of as a virtual pilgrimage by the estimated 5.5 million adherents of the Bahá'í Faith in the world today.

Bahá'ís may individually or collectively commemorate the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh with prayers and readings as befit the occasion, often followed by refreshments and fellowship in a dignified manner. Among the Bahá'í readings, of special relevance to this occasion include: Nabíl's account of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh; the Tablet of Visitation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; the "Book of the Covenant" (Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament, appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahá as successor); passages in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* relating to the succession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the "Tablet of the Branch"; and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first message to the Bahá'ís, announcing Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, advising Bahá'ís not to be disconsolate, and to remain steadfast.

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh is of special moment, commemorating the life and contributions of a great religious figure in modern history, whose shrine has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and whose universal principles

of world unity may, in the course of time, be recognized as an enduring contribution to the world's heritage.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of (November 12)

The Festival of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh is one of five Bahá’í festivals, and one of the nine Bahá’í holy days on which work is to be suspended. It is a joyous occasion, for it celebrates the historic birth of the prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith, whose prophetic role as the “World-Reformer” and “World-Unifier” is at the core of Bahá’í belief regarding the person and work of Bahá’u’lláh.

In “founded” religions, the birth of the founder is accorded historic and religious importance. Beyond their intrinsic and honorific significance, the birth and childhood of Bahá’u’lláh relate to the birth of the Bahá’í Faith, in that certain childhood experiences are said to have had a formative influence. What is singular about the birth of Bahá’u’lláh is that it is part of a double religious holy day, called “the Festival of the Twin Birthdays.”

The Bahá’í Faith was founded by Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, known by his spiritual title, Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), and by Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), better known as the Báb (“the Gate”), who claimed to be the Qá’im

(“Ariser”/“Resurrector”), the messianic figure expected in Shi‘i Islam, the majority faith in Iran. Throughout his six-year ministry, the Báb heralded “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” whose advent was imminent. Most of the Bábís (followers of the Báb) came to accept Bahá'u'lláh as that messianic figure. Many current Bahá'í laws, in fact, were originally instituted by the Báb and were subsequently selectively ratified and revised by Bahá'u'lláh and set forth in the preeminent Bahá'í scripture, *The Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas)*. The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the Birth of the Báb are therefore closely linked for several reasons.

Bahá'u'lláh was born at dawn on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, the capital of Persia (now Iran), in the district known as the Darvázih Shimrán, which was at the edge of the city. His father was Mírzá Buzurg, Vazír of Núr (a province in Persia). Bahá'u'lláh's mother was Khadíjih Khánum, Mírzá Buzurg's second wife. As a child, the young Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí is said to have never cried, nor showed restlessness. He would spend summers in Takúr, the ancestral home of his father, Mírzá Buzurg, in the province of Núr. Bahá'u'lláh recounts one memorable event that took place on the last of seven days of festivities of the marriage of one of his older brothers:

When I was still a child and had not yet attained the age of maturity, . . . it was announced that the play “Sháh Sultán Salím” would be presented. . . . After this the king held audience with his court, during which intelligence was received that a rebellion had broken out on a certain frontier. . . . A few moments later cannons were heard booming from behind the tent, and it was announced that a battle had been engaged. This Youth regarded the scene with great amazement. When the royal audience was ended, the curtain was drawn, and, after some twenty minutes, a man emerged from behind the tent carrying a box under his arm. “What is this box,” I asked him, “and what was the nature of this display?” “All this lavish display and these elaborate devices,” he replied, “the king, the princes, and the ministers, their pomp and glory, their might and power, everything you saw, are now contained within this box.” . . . Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle. (Bahá'u'lláh, “Lawḥ-i-Ra’ís.” *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 165–67)

As a young nobleman, Bahá'u'lláh manifested great sagacity and mastery of argument, and was known as the “Father of the Poor” for his beneficence in Tákur and its vicinity. He later became a prominent figure in the Bábí religion. In 1852, while in prison during the unrest that followed the Báb's execution under religious decree and by a government firing squad of 750 men on July 9, 1850, Bahá'u'lláh experienced a series of visions and accepted his role as the Promised One foretold by the Báb and in the messianic texts of all religions.

By imperial decree, Bahá'u'lláh was subsequently exiled to Baghdad (1853–1863), to Istanbul (1863), Adrianople (1863–1868), then to ‘Akká (Acre) in

Palestine (1868–1892), where he would spend the rest of his life in custody in Palestine, although the last years were in relative comfort under house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh died on May 29, 1892, in Bahji, Palestine.

In the Most Holy Book (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*), Bahá'u'lláh established the five festivals of the Bahá'í year, having ratified the observance of Naw-Rúz, which the Báb had previously designated as a religious festival (the only holy day instituted in the *Persian Bayán*): “All Feasts have attained their consummation in the two Most Great Festivals, and in the two other Festivals that fall on the twin days.” The “two Most Great Festivals” are the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh (known as the “Festival of Ridván” (“Paradise”) from April 21 to May 2 (commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's initial proclamation of his prophetic mission in Baghdad, April 21–May 2, 1863), and the Declaration of the Báb, which occurred on the evening of May 22, 1844 (but dated May 23 since, in the Bahá'í calendar, the new day begins at sunset the previous day). The other two Bahá'í festivals are the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

As the cofounders of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh and his predecessor, the Báb, are often referred to as the “Twin Manifestations,” and the occasions of their respective births are similarly called the “Twin Birthdays.” The birthdays of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fall on two consecutive days in the Muslim lunar calendar. “The Birth of the Abhá Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh],” Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “was at the hour of dawn on the second day of the month of Muḥarram, the first day of which marketh the Birth of His Herald [the Báb]. These two days are accounted as one in the sight of God.” The explanation for this statement is that, in the Muslim lunar calendar, the birth of the Báb was on the first day of the month of Muḥarram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the birth of Bahá'u'lláh took place on the second day of Muḥarram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817).

While the Bahá'í calendar (of 19 months of 19 days, plus intercalary days) is solar, Bahá'ís in parts of the Middle East observe these two Bahá'í holy days according to the lunar calendar (which is how they were observed by Bahá'u'lláh himself), while Bahá'ís of the West and elsewhere (such as among the Bahá'ís in Syria and Lebanon) celebrate these occasions by their corresponding dates on the Common Era calendar. In the future, the Universal House of Justice will determine whether these “Twin Days” will be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis.

In observing the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís normally refrain from working and/or attending school. Whether celebrated jointly as one occasion or independently, these are joyous events for Bahá'ís, who rejoice together to increase the unity of the community through collective worship and fellowship, often through devotional meetings or musical programs. There is no prescribed ceremony or service for celebrating the event, and all who would like to attend are welcomed.

Christopher Buck and J. Gordon Melton

See also ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast;

Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Baisakhi. See Wesak/Vesak

Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord

Balarama is the elder brother of the deity Krishna. In contrast to Krishna, usually pictured as having dark skin, Balarama is pictured as of fair skin. He is depicted as being of light color. One story tells of Balarama being born of a light hair of Vishnu. As Vaishnava Hindu thought developed, Balarama has attained status as another *avatara* (incarnation) of Vishnu, as an incarnation not of Adishesha, the divine serpent upon which Vishnu rests, or an extension of the incarnation of Krishna so that both are seen as “parts” of one whole. In the scriptures, however, Balarama appears primarily as an additional character in the stories of Krishna, and almost never by himself apart from him.

From his conception, Balarama's life was threatened. The king in whose service his father was employed had been told that his mother Devaki would bear the person who would eventually kill him. Thus, he had each child born to Devaki and her husband Vasudeva killed, six in all. Balarama was as an unborn embryo miraculously removed from Devaki's womb to that of Vasudeva's second wife Rohini, who eventually bore Balarama. Balarama's younger brother was also attended by miracles at his birth. The guards who would have slain him fell asleep, and he was carried away to be raised by Yashoda, a woman of a humble cow-herding family.

Balarama is usually also present in temples dedicated to Krishna. During the Indian month of Shravana (July–August on the Common Era calendar), Vaishnavas celebrate the pastimes of Krishna as a youth among the Gopis (the young women who tended



Two statues stand on an altar in honor of Lord Balarama. (J. Gordon Melton)

the cows) with the Jhulan Yatra festival, which culminates on the purnima or day of the full moon of the month. The purnima of Shravana is also understood to be the appearance day of Lord Balarama. It is a time, especially in the various groups that continue the bhakti (devotional) yoga of the Bengali saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533), for directing devotion to Krishna through his brother.

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See also Janmashtami; Jhulan Yatra; Narieli Purnima.

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Baptism of the Lord, Feast of the

Epiphany, the Christian holiday that occurs 12 days after Christmas and was commonly associated with the visit of the Three Magi to the baby Jesus (January 6), was also a day to celebrate the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and the wedding feast at Cana, where Jesus turned the water into wine. These three events were tied together as events in which the action of God was manifest in the world.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, after the fourth century, the emphasis of Epiphany was almost entirely focused on the visit of the Magi, which over time led to a desire to have another day to recognize Jesus's baptism.

That desire was not acted upon until 1955, however, when, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) instituted a separate liturgical commemoration of the baptism to be held on January 13. That innovation was affirmed by Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963). In the general re-ordering of the liturgical calendar in 1969, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) adjusted the date of the feast, setting its date as the first Sunday after January 6, or, where Epiphany is celebrated on January 7 or 8, the baptism will be commemorated on the following Monday. Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) further developed the celebration, initiating a tradition of baptizing babies in the Sistine Chapel on that day.

The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the baptism of Jesus on January 6 in what is called the Feast of the Theophany, with an emphasis that on this day as a moment of divine disclosure. The eve before is a fast day, and no milk, meat, butter, or cooking fats are consumed, and no food is consumed until a sip of holy water is drunk. A little holy water, the same water normally used in baptismal services, is also added to the food. During the worship service on the day of Theophany, the water in the baptismal font is blessed with a prayer that it become a fountain of immortality and lead to the remission of sins, the purification of souls and bodies, and the healing of infirmities.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Epiphany; John the Baptist, Beheading of; John the Baptist, Nativity of; Theophany.

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Bartholomew's Day, Saint (August 24)

Bartholomew is mentioned as one of Jesus's 12 apostles in three of the New Testament Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but nothing is said of him uniquely. He was present at Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:4). He is generally identified as the same person called Nathaniel in John's Gospel, where he had a famous encounter with Jesus.

Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Nathanael said unto him, "From where do you know me?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel."

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw thee underneath the fig tree,' do you believe? you shalt see greater things than these."

And he said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (John 1:45–51)

After Jesus's resurrection and ascension, and Pentecost, according to church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263–339 CE) in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bartholomew went to India. Other traditions place him in various locations including Ethiopia, Mesopotamia, Parthia, and Lycaonia, but most importantly in Armenia. Armenians claim that two apostles, Bartholomew and Jude, went to Armenia in the first century and began the process of converting the country. Both he and Jude are considered patron saints by the Armenian Apostolic Church. Bartholomew was believed to have been martyred in the Vaspurakan province, a former part of Armenia in what is southeastern Turkey). In the 13th century, the Armenians built a monastery in his honor over his reputed martyrdom site.

The Armenian Church honors Saint Bartholomew on December 1, along with Jude (a.k.a. Thaddeus), reputedly 1 of the 70 sent out by Jesus as the first missionaries (Luke 10:1). Most of the Eastern Church celebrates Bartholomew on June 11. The Egyptian Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Church have a very different tradition and commemorate him on August 29. The Western Church established August 24 as Saint Bartholomew's Day, a date that was passed to the Anglican and Lutheran Churches in the 16th century. It was a popular day for towns across Europe to hold open markets and later summer festivals.

Relics of Saint Bartholomew have been reported in a variety of locations over the centuries. They emerged at the beginning of the sixth century, when they were reputedly given to the city of Dura Europos (in what today is Syria). A short time later, they appeared in Sicily from whence they were moved to Benevento (north of Naples) in the ninth century and on to Rome in the 10th century, when placed in the newly constructed Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the island. Fragments of Bartholomew found their way elsewhere, including a piece of his skull to Frankfurt, and an arm to the cathedral at Canterbury.

The perception of how people celebrate Saint Bartholomew's Day was radically changed in 1572 when in the wake of a peace being negotiated between warring Protestant and Catholic factions in France, Catholics turned on the Protestants and without prior warning, massacred some 20,000 people. The French king had approved the peace and set up a wedding between his sister and a leading Protestant member of the royalty, Henry of Navarre. The massacre seems to have been instituted by the king's mother, Catherine de Medici (1519–1589). The massacre began in Paris and spread to the countryside, especially in southern France where the Protestants were the strongest.

In reaction to the events of the week beginning on Saint Bartholomew's Day, Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585) had a commemorative medal struck. The event would sour Catholic-Protestant relations for centuries. In spite of the massacre, both the Lutherans and Anglicans maintained the date on their liturgical calendars, though it was never a prominent date.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Andrew, Saint's Day of St.; James the Greater, Feast Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts; Reformation Sunday.

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Basket Dance

The Tewa Native American people reside at the San Ildefonso, San Juan, Santa Clara, Nambe, and Tesuque pueblos in the Rio Grande Valley in northern New Mexico. One additional pueblo, the Hano, is in Arizona on what is now Hopi country. Its residents' ancestors moved from New Mexico as a result of the Pueblo revolt of 1680–1692. The Tewa people are now overwhelmingly Roman Catholic in faith, but have maintained some of their traditional religious celebrations, one being the spring Basket Dance.

This dance ceremony is built around a set of baskets, which are used to symbolize the food they normally hold and to celebrate the women who normally carry them. The dance is a fertility ceremony asking the gods to promote fertility among the plants, animals, and humans.

In centuries past, the dance was held in the spring, but as the Tewa adopted Catholicism, the priests objected to holding it during Lent; hence, it was pushed back into the winter season and is now held in late January or early February.

J. Gordon Melton

See also First Salmon Rites; Three Kings Day, Native American Pueblos.

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Befana (January 5)

In Italian popular culture, Befana is an aged and unattractive woman dressed in a black shawl and dirty clothes. In spite of her rude appearance, children look forward to her coming as she is the one who will bring them gifts on the Eve of Epiphany (January 6).

Like Santa Claus, Befana has the power to spot “bad” children and leave them coal, soot, or ill-smelling garlic instead of the gifts for which they had been hoping. Thus, children will, in the weeks preceding Epiphany, attempt to display a range of “good” traits. They will go to bed early on Epiphany Eve and rise early the next morning to discover what Befana has left for them.

In the modern world, the story of Befana has mixed with that of Santa Claus, and many have come to view her as the wife of Santa Claus. A much older story ties her to the Three Magi. As they departed to bring their gifts to the baby Jesus, a woman was planning to accompany them but, at the last minute, decided against the trip. A day after they departed, she again decided to go, but now it was too late. She never saw the Christ child. To make up for her indecision, she has ever since visited the homes to give the good children all the gifts she was unable to present to the baby Jesus. She flies around on a broom and carries a large canvas sack on her shoulders.

The origins of Befana have been lost to history, but it was popular in Italy by the 13th century. Some have attempted to trace it to pre-Christian beliefs and practices. The word *befana* may be a corruption of Epiphany.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany.

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Two men dressed as the *Green Man* participate in the annual Beltane Festival parade in London. (Wendy Leber/Dreamstime.com)

Beltane (May 1)

Beltane, or May Day, which occurs halfway between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, is a contemporary holiday celebrated by the Pagan and Wiccan community. Modern Wiccans and Pagans have developed in response to the call by Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964) in the 1950s for a revived community practicing Witchcraft. He proposed eight annual festivals spaced evenly through the solar year. Those through the spring, summer, and fall recall the agricultural season of planting, growing, and harvesting, while the winter is a time of pause before another season is initiated.

By the beginning of May, the land has recovered from the winter deadness, and everywhere, the new life of spring flourishes. The planting has been completed, and the primary task is

tending the field and caring for the animals. The environment everywhere suggests the fertility of nature. There is a moment to pause and celebrate that fertility, especially that of the young adults who have a brief period to pause and find a mate.

The celebration of this moment is signaled by the crowning of a May Queen from among the eligible young women of childbearing age, and the dancing around the May pole. It is a time in which the courting begun at the spring equinox may come to fruition in mating.

Beltane is often conflated with Walpurgisnacht, a northern European celebration that is centered more on May Eve with a night of music and dancing around a bonfire. For a variety of reasons, the Wiccan/Pagan community had tended to favor celebrations during the day on May 1, but some have moved to incorporate the evening bonfire, which can begin a night of passion in the arms of a favored mate.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Eostara; Fall Equinox; Imbolc; Lammas; Litha; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Walpurgisnacht; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St. (July 11)

Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–543) was the founder of Western Christian monasticism, his rules for the monastic life being possibly the single most influential document in spite of the large number of orders for both men and women that have emerged over the centuries. He began life in a well-to-do family that provided him a good education that culminated in his study in Rome. Early in life, however, he became depressed at the problems that had emerged in the society in which he dwelt: war, immorality, Pagans angry over the expansion of Christianity, and general worldliness. Around 500 CE, he withdrew and adopted the life of a hermit.

He lived in a secluded cave for three years, where he developed the idea of bringing the scattered hermits into a single large monastery. There, they would be withdrawn from the world but be able to experience community, a sense of unity, and continued group worship. He began construction of a center that would become the monastery of Monte Cassino, overlooking three valleys that led to the mountains north of Naples, Italy.

It was for the community that developed at Monte Cassino that he developed a set of rules to order the common life of residents relative to prayer, study, manual labor, and community living and authority structures. Heading the community would be the abbot, who would assume a fatherly role. Monasticism would flourish over the next centuries and would initially be united into the Benedictine system. Little detail is known of the rest of his life, which he spent living as a monk at Monte Cassino. He died there on March 21, 547. His feast day was kept on July 11 for many centuries, but in the most recent calendar of saints, it has been moved to July 11, the date on which some monasteries commemorated the transfer of Benedict's relics to the Fleury Abbey in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire in Loiret, France. (This movement of Benedict's body in the seventh century is disputed by monks at Monte Cassino, who claim they have Benedict's relics, though they have not shown a body to back up their claim.)

In 1964, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) named Benedict one of the patron protectors of Europe.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Dominic, Saint's Day of St.; Sankt Placidusfest.

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Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St. (April 3)

St. Benedict the African (1526–1589) was an African who was born and grew up in slavery because his parents were slaves. In the middle of the 16th century, he found himself far from his traditional homeland toiling away in Sicily. After he was freed at the age of 18, he took up farming and later became associated with a small group of hermits who had adopted the rule of Saint Francis. Pope Pius IV (r. 1555–1559) moved to regularize the group and ordered them into affiliation with the larger Franciscan order. Showing some ability, Benedict was forced to the fore and appointed to various leadership positions among his brothers before being allowed to resume his more humble position in the kitchen.

In his mature years, he became known for his gift of prayer and the solid guidance he provided those in the spiritual pathway. He slept only a minimal number of hours and regularly fasted. Among those impressed by Benedict was King Philip III of Spain, who saw to the construction of a special tomb to house the future saint's body. Benedict was beatified in 1743 and canonized in 1807. Lutherans honor him as a confessor of the faith (April 4), and Roman Catholics named him one of the patron saints for African Americans. Among his saintly traits was his forbearance in the face of an intense racism throughout his life. He is also included on the list of incorruptibles, as his body was exhumed after his canonization and was found to be well preserved.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Martin de Porres, Saint's Day of St.

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Bhairava Ashtami

Bhairava Ashtami is an annual celebration of the Hindu deity Shiva in the form of the deity Bhairava, one of Shiva's manifestations. One story about Shiva tells of a discussion among the three main Hindu deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—which turned into a heated argument. The three began discussing which of them was ultimately the greatest. As each offered his own rationale to be considered the greater, they began to criticize each other. In the process, Brahma made a remark that enraged Shiva. In reaction, he manifested an alter ego as Bhairava, whom he ordered to sever one of Brahma's five heads. Bhairava immediately responded to Shiva's command, and thus Brahma lost one of his heads and became the four-headed deity he is commonly seen as to this day. Shiva's action terrorized the other deities, and they moved quickly to worship him and his manifestation as Bhairava.

Bhairava presents Shiva in his terrible form and as a somewhat menacing character. He is worshipped to gain success and prosperity, to remove obstacles, and for healing of physical illnesses. Bhairava is also Shiva's instrument for punishing sinners, and is thus to be respected. He is sometimes called Dandapani, as he carries a *danda* (or staff). He is most commonly pictured riding or sitting upon a dog.

Bhairava Ashtami is held on the eighth day of the waning moon in the Indian Hindu month of Magha (November–December on the Common Era calendar). This day is also considered the anniversary of his initial appearance or birthday. For believers (in Saivite Hinduism), the day will begin with a morning bath, to be followed by homage to one's ancestors. The most important activity of the day will be the puja (worship) to Bhairava and to his mount, the dog. Both will be offered milk and sweets. In the evening, a vigil will be kept at which time stories of Bhairava will be shared. On this day, feeding dogs in general is considered an especially holy action.

Bhairava is also seen as the Lord of the March of Time, and in the modern world, the emphasis on time has found a new resonance. On Bhairava Ashtami, people will be reminded of the importance of using time efficiently and of using it to pursue spiritual ends. Most Shiva temples include a shrine to Bhairava.

Constance A. Jones

See also Mahashivaratri.

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Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Appearance Day of

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura (1874–1937) was a prominent leader and teacher of Vaishnava Hinduism in Bengal in the first half of the 20th century. In 1918, he formed the Gaudiya Math, an organization for the propagation of devotional Vaishnava Hinduism in the form popularized by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), the 16th-century Bengalese saint revered for reviving *bhakti* (devotional) yoga in eastern India. The Gaudiya Math was responsible for the spread of devotional Vaishnavism to Europe and North America.

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati is most remembered today as the spiritual master of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), who in the 1960s brought devotional Vaishnavism to the United States and founded the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). That organization spread the teaching throughout the world and has in recent decades become a potent force in the parent community in India.

ISKCON and other Vaishnava groups remember Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura for his opposition to the caste system and his advocacy of the personalized approach to understanding the Divine, as opposed to much of Hinduism that understands the Divine primarily in impersonal categories. He was the author of numerous books and essays.

On this day, the members of ISKCON fast until noon and then feast in the afternoon and evening. It is observed early in the month of Phalguna on the Hindu calendar (usually in February on the Common Era calendar).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Appearance Day of; Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

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Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Appearance Day of

In the late 19th century, Bhaktivinoda Thakura (1838–1914) emerged at a time when the devotional (*bhakti*) Vaishnavism as taught by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

(1486–1534) had spread through Bengal, and Orissa had all but disappeared. In the 1860s, he became attracted to the practice of spreading love of God through chanting of his names, though he perceived that the stream of teaching and practice initiated by Chaitanya had become polluted. He obtained copies of the then-rare sacred texts *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which described the pastimes of Krishna, and the biography of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, and as he mastered the texts, he began preaching and writing. He wrote a number of books, some of which were in English and initially opened the door for Westerners to find their way to Vaishnava practice.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura remained a family man, fathered a number of children, and continued to work for the government most of his life. Bhaktivinoda was initiated by Bipin Bihari Goswami, a descendant of the family of Vamsivadananda Thakur, a companion of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He used his job to search for and locate the birthplace of Chaitanya, which later became a pilgrimage site.

He passed his lineage to his son Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura (1874–1937), the founder of the Gaudiya Math, the main Krishna consciousness organization in Bengal. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura became the guru (teacher) of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura was born on what was September 2 on the Common Era calendar, but within the movement he founded, his birthday is reckoned according to the Indian Hindu calendar. According to that calendar, he was born on the 13th day of the waning moon in the month of Bhadrapad, which may from year to year be either in late August or early September. His birthday is a day of fasting through the movement, including the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Appearance Day of; Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

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Bhishma Ashtami

Bhishma Ashtami is a minor holiday observed in Bengal and parts of southern India in remembrance of Bhishma, a warrior who fought and died in the war of Kurukshetra, the battles of which fill so many pages of the *Mahabharata*. Bhishma

was the son of King Santanu, who had given his son a boon, in that he would be allowed to choose his own day of death. Bhishma had taken an oath not to marry and that he would ever remain faithful to his father's throne.

As the Kurukshetra war approached, he was obliged to enter the war on the side of the Kauravas, one of two main family factions involved in the war. On the other side were the Pandavas. It is remembered that as the war began, Arjuna, who was to fight with the Pandavas, questioned the deity Krishna about his confusion at having to fight his own family members in the war. That conversation was recorded as what today is known as the Bhagavad Gita. In the early days of the war, Arjuna and Bhishma would be locked in battle.

Krishna had vowed to remain neutral in the war, but as the war continued, the Kauravas were suffering repeated defeats. King Duryodhan began to suspect it was due to Bhishma not giving his best. In response, Bhishma renewed his effort and suddenly it appeared that only Krishna was capable of opposing him effectively. Krishna, who favored the Pandavas, was forced to enter the battle.

On the 10th day, at Krishna's suggestion, the Pandavas sent Shikhandi, a warrior who had been a woman in a prior life, against Bhishma, knowing that he has taken a vow not to attack a woman. Arjuna then positioned himself behind Shikhandi and attacked Bhishma with arrows, eventually finding the weak points in his armor. Bhishma was mortally wounded.

Bhishma had promised his father that he would live until Hastinapur, the Kaurava capital city, was secured. To keep this promise, Bhishma used the boon of choosing his death date to remain alive until after the war was over and peace restored. Bhishma died on the first day of Uttarayana, that half of the year after the winter solstice in which the sun enters the constellation Capricorn and begins its long journey north.

Bhishma Ashtami is observed on the eighth day of the waxing moon in the Indian Hindu month of Magha (January–February on the Common Era calendar). The day is believed by many to be the day that Bhishma's soul departed his body, and they dedicated the day to his memory.

Observers in Bengal hold special pujas on this day, while in southern India, many will commemorate Bhishma with a fast.

Constance A. Jones

See also Gita Jayanti; Makar Sankranti.

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Bhumanandaji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru (December 24)

Swami Guru Bhumanandaji Paramahansa (1873–1958) was the second guru in the lineage of the present-day Ajapa Yoga Society. Born in Bengal in 1873 as Panchen Ganguli, the future guru grew up to become a scholar of the Hindu scriptures. Then early in the 20th century, he met Guru Purnanandaji Paramahansa, who visited his hometown. Three years later, he was initiated into Ajapa yoga, a system built around breathing and meditation. He continued to work at his secular job and head his family, and visited his guru as time allowed.

Then in the 1920s, as Guru Purnanandaji aged and prepared for the end of his earthly existence, he appointed Ganguli as his successor. In 1928, he emerged as Guru Bhumanandaji, the lineage holder and head of the Ajapa movement. He remained in that position for the next 30 years. Along the way, he initiated Guru Janardanji Paramahansa (1888–1980) to assist him and eventually succeed him.

Today, the Ajapa Yoga Society honors Guru Bhumanandaji for his work to build the society and transmit the teaching. Each year on December 24, members and friends of the society gather for a commemorative service at the different ashrams and centers of the society in India, Bangladesh, Europe, and North America. Attendees are treated to a feast and then join in with a time of meditation and prayers. They are asked to bring a flower to place on the altar in the meditation hall, and a dish to share during the meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Janardanji Paramahansa, Commemoration Days of Swami Guru; Prasadji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Purnanandaji Paramahansa, Commemoration Day for Swami Guru.

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Bible Sunday (October)

The idea of Bible Sunday, a day to emphasize the continuing importance of the Bible to Protestant Christians, began in 1904 as a way to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the British and Foreign Bible Society (now known as simply the Bible Society). In January of that year, the *Times* (of London) published an initial article

promoting the idea, and the initial celebration occurred on March 6. The Society had been founded in 1804 to supply Bibles to those too poor to afford one and to those who needed a Bible in their own language (which increasingly became the same individuals). Of immediate concern were Bibles in the Welsh language. It went on to become the foremost of a set of national Bible societies in countries around the world, especially the former British colonies.

The British society found widespread support both for its publication of inexpensive editions of the Bible printed and distributed for a low price, if not given away. And soon after the proposal of Bible Sunday, it was adopted as an event in the Church of England's liturgical year. It was observed on the second Sunday of Advent until the late 1990s, when it was shifted to the last Sunday in October. Meanwhile, the celebration was picked up by other denominations, and spread internationally. The Bible societies in the West largely succeeded in placing Bibles in homes throughout Western Europe and North America, and the emphasis shifted to the rest of the world. A significant surge in Bible publishing occurred in the 1990s following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, it is concentrated on translating the Bible into the several thousand remaining languages that have yet to be reduced to writing, a process that includes creating a written language. The societies also strategize about getting the Bible distributed in places where it is not freely available to people.

Bible Sunday observance is usually integrated into the regular Sunday worship of congregations, which will devote an amount of time to calling the emphases of the day to churchgoers and possibly taking a special offering to support the work.

J. Gordon Melton

See also National Bible Week.

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Birth of Mary. See Nativity of Mary

Black Christ, Festival of the (October 21)

The "Black Christ" ("Christo Negro") is the prized possession of the Iglesia de San Felipe, a Roman Catholic church in Portobelo, Panama. Annually, it is the object of many pilgrimages through the year, and on one day a year, the church hosts a celebration of the figure's presence in the relatively small village. By all accounts, the life-size figure of Christ carrying the cross was originally carved in Spain and was subsequently shipped to the New World. Among the several stories of the circumstances by which it came to be housed at the church in Portobelo, one suggests that at some

point in the 17th century, the ship that carried the statue from Spain had taken haven in the Portobelo harbor during a storm. Then, after the storm, each time the ship made ready to leave, a new unexpected storm would rise. Finally, as the ship left, the sailors threw the statue overboard. Local fishermen recovered the statue, which was taken to the local church. The date of the statue's arrival is not known, but it predates the building of the present church, initially constructed in 1814.

The reputation of the statue was sealed when a plague spread along the coast. People began to pray to the statue, and by all accounts, the plague did not visit Portobelo. From that time, there have been regular stories emerging of new miracles attributed to prayers to the statue. People of African descent have especially identified with the statue and, from the earliest times when slavery still existed in Panama, paid visits to it, most walking from their homes. Today, a few will walk the 53 miles from Panama City, while thousands walk the 22 miles from Sabanitas. Many will crawl the last mile on their hands and knees to worship before El Nazareno, one of the names given to the Black Christ by locals.

Though there is not a mandate, many pilgrims wear ornate purple robes (as Jesus wore when Romans mocked his claim to kingship) as they approach the church. These robes will be taken off around midnight on the steps of the church. The robes are a message that the individual is responding to God in making their pilgrimage, be it merely an expression of their faith or a plea for forgiveness of sin.

The statue rests on the church's main altar, which is adorned with a gold image of objects associated with Christ's crucifixion, such as nails, a crown of thorns, and dice such as used by the Roman soldiers. The image of Christ will be adorned with a robe that has been donated by believers from different parts of the country. Twice annually, a new robe is placed on the statue, and the old one retired permanently and placed in the collection of previous robes kept in the nearby Iglesia de San Juan de Dios, which, as of 2010, houses more than 60 robes.

Once a year, as the October 21 festival looms near, the figure of Christ is moved to the middle of the church. This move is the occasion for changing the robe. The new robe will be red. After the festival, the figure will be returned to the side of the altar. Then for Holy Week each spring, the robe is changed again, this time the color being green. The many robes used to the present represent many styles, ranging from the simple to the elaborate, from those made of poor materials to some richly and elaborately decorated. One of the more famous robes was donated by the champion Panamanian boxer Roberto Duran.

October 21 has been designated the Feast Day of the Cristo Negro de Portobelo, and the town's population will swell by as much as 60,000 that day. Many pilgrims have a criminal past and come to ask forgiveness for their crimes. So many have come with such stories that the Panamanians have informally designated the Black Christ as the patron saint of criminals. At the same time, many who come are ill and they arrive seeking a healing.

On October 21, the Mass will begin at 6:00 p.m. As it concludes around 8:00 p.m., a select group of some 80 men will hoist the statue aloft and begin a

four-hour procession carrying it around town. In contrast to the solemnity of the Mass, the procession becomes a joyous, celebrative occasion. Those carrying the cross proceed slowly using a three-steps-forward-and-two-steps-backward format popularized in Spain. Each of the 80 will have shaved their heads, taken off their shoes, and donned a purple robe. As midnight approaches, the Christo Negro is returned to the church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Black Nazarene Festival.

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Black Nazarene Festival (January 9)

The Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila, Philippines, houses a statue of Jesus brought from Mexico in the 17th century that over the last two centuries has become the focus of a unique local celebration. The statue originally arrived in Manila in the company of a group of Augustinian Recollect friars in 1606. The friars were members of a reformed branch of the Augustinians founded in Spain in the previous century. They placed the statue in their church in Bagumbayan (now part of the Rizal Park), and dedicated it to Saint John the Baptist. Two years later, it was moved to a new, larger church building dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Tolentine. The Recollect Fathers used the statue as an object of their devotion to the Suffering of Our Lord, and in 1650 received papal approval for a lay organization that promoted the devotion, the Cofradia de Santo Cristo Jesús Nazareno. A century later, in 1787, shortly before his death, the archbishop of Manila, Basilio Sancho de Santas Junta y Rufina, decreed the movement of the statue to the church in Quiapo.

No one is sure when the statue turned black. Actually, it was made from a somewhat dark-colored wood. The local tradition, however, suggests that when originally carved by an Aztec artist the statue was white, but on the voyage to the Philippines, the boat that carried it caught fire, from which it got its black complexion. If that is the case, it would not be its last fire or near disaster. It has survived fires that destroyed Quiapo Church in 1791 and 1929, great earthquakes in 1645 and 1863, and the bombing of the city in 1945 as World War II was nearing its end. Devotion to the statue of Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno grew steadily through the 19th and 20th centuries, initially through Luzon and then the entire country. Its popularity has been helped by the many stories of healing connected with it.

The annual festival/feast of the Most Holy Black Nazarene, held on January 9, began early in the 19th century. On that day, the Black Nazarene statue is processed through the streets of Quiapo in a gold-and-red carriage pulled by male devotees clad in maroon. In 1998, due to damage suffered by the statue in previous

years, church leaders had a replica of the original statue made, and it is now utilized in the annual procession, while the original remains inside the church. The procession focuses on the devotion that has continued to the suffering Christ, and also commemorates the transfer of the statue to its present home in Quiapo. Homage to the Santo Cristo Jesús Nazareno is made by clapping hands in praise at the end of every Mass performed at the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene.

During the feast, people seek the opportunity to get close enough to the statue to touch it, in the belief that its touch will be effective in curing their disease. Unable to reach it, they will give pieces of cloth to the people protecting the statue with a request that they rub it on the statue in the hope that the cloth will pick up some of the statue's power.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Black Christ, Festival of the.

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Blajini, Easter of the

As part of their Easter celebrations, Romanians also tell the story of the Blajini, and vary their celebration accordingly.

The Blajini are a mythical race perceived as living on the other side of the Earth in traditional Romanian folklore, where the Earth was perceived as a disc with two sides. The other side, which none had actually seen, was thought of as very like the mundane world but inhabited by a set of humanlike creatures called *Blajini*, or the "gentle/kind-hearted ones." They are seen as somehow bringing great benefit to humans, and the celebration of Easter for them is seen as a way of repaying them.

Romanians reasoned that the Blajini have no way of knowing when Easter comes, as they live an isolated existence. Thus, Romanians create colored Easter eggs, which they consume, but then they throw the shells into the rivers and allow them to float downstream to what was in ancient folklore a boundless ocean called Apa Sâmbetei. Once in the ocean, the shells would make their way to the Blajini.

There have been several explanations as to the origin of the Blajini. Some described them as the descendants of Seth, the son of the biblical Adam. Others traced their origin to the story of Moses and the escape of the Israelites from Egypt by parting the waters of the Red Sea. The Blajini were the Egyptians who pursued the Israelites. When they tried to follow them through the parted waters, Moses released the waters and sent them to their current abode. Both accounts obviously mix older folklore with the later Christianity introduced into Romania.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter.

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Blessing of the Fleet

The Blessing of the Fleet is an event now found in a number of locations along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States centered on a priestly blessing of the commercial fishing fleet operating out of a specific port, but developed into a local holiday. The current practice seems to have emerged in the 20th century, to have spread in the decades after World War II, but to have been transferred for older practices in southern Europe, whose origins have been lost in the past.

The practice was reborn as a fishing industry was developed in the 1920s along the Gulf Coast. Possibly the first of the several modern Blessing of the Fleet events was held in 1929 in Biloxi, Mississippi. The celebration began with the brightly decorated fishing boats tying up on the bay. A Catholic Mass was led by the local priest from a temporary altar placed on the bay shore and ended with the priest moving from boat to boat, blessing each one with a prayer. Today the officiating priest stands on an auspiciously placed boat as the other boats process by for a blessing. The event was grounded in biblical references to Jesus's calling of fishermen to be among his 12 apostles.



A shrimp trawler is adorned with flags for the Blessing of the Fleet in Biloxi, Mississippi. (Mississippi Arts Commission)

Similar blessings began in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, and Brunswick, Georgia, in the late 1940s; Stonington, Connecticut, in the mid-1950s; Darien, Georgia, in the late 1960s; and St. Lucie, Florida, in the early 1970s. The local Greek Orthodox priest leads the ceremony in Tarpon Springs, Florida. Starting as a small event usually organized by fishermen who were pious church laypeople, the blessing of the fleets have become major tourist attractions for a number of smaller cities, and are advertised widely. In various places, it has grown into weekend-long public celebrations that will include parades, feastings, contests, beauty queen pageants, and late-night parties.

There are no set dates upon which the blessing ceremonies are held, though most are held in the spring and early summer.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Mazu Festival, Goddess.

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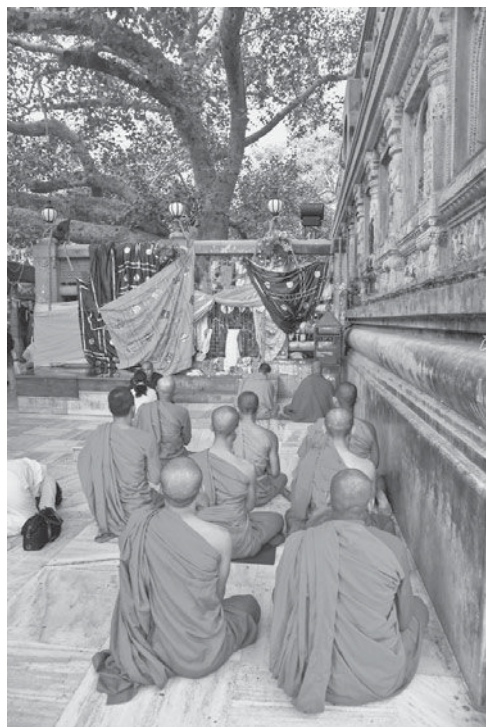
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Bodhi Day (December 8)

Bodhi Day, also called Rohatsu or Shaka-Jōdō-e (in Japan), is a Buddhist celebration of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. According to the account of Gautama Buddha’s life, after a number of years in which he experienced a variety of extremes in order to find enlightenment, he set under a fig (pipal) tree at a place now called Bodh Gaya in India and vowed not to rise until he had discovered Truth. After 49 days meditating, he attained enlightenment. He was 35 years old. In most Theravada Buddhist lands, this enlightenment event is believed to have occurred in the fifth lunar month on the same day of the month as his birthday (Wesak), which would also years later become the same day of the year he died. In Thailand, the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment early in life while standing with his father watching men ploughing, and is remembered on a separate Ploughing Day.

According to most Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, the enlightenment occurred on the eighth day of the 12th lunar month (late November–early December on the Common Era calendar). Thus, China (including Tibet), Mongolia, Korea, and Japan hold a separate festival to remember Buddha’s enlightenment. All traditions believe that enlightenment came as the Morning Star rose in the sky during the early morning hours. At this moment, the Buddha experienced what is termed Nirvana, variously described as the extinction of the triple fires of greed, anger, and delusion that leads to an end to suffering, or as a mode of being in which the individual is freed of various mental aberrations such as lust, anger, or greed. Buddhists consider it the highest spiritual state. Its attainment rids one of consequences (karma) and thus the need to incarnate where life is characterized by wandering through realms of desire and form (*samsara*), and its accompanying suffering.

As Buddhism was transmitted to China, it encountered the Laba Festival honoring ancestors that was held on the eighth day of the 12th lunar month. It identified that same day as the day that Gautama Buddha gained enlightenment. An accompanying story told of how the Buddha had reached a point of discouragement and hunger in his practice. About to give up the pursuit, he encountered a shepherd girl. She shared



Monks pray under the Bodhi tree, Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhi Gaya, India. (Luciano Mortula/Dreamstime.com)

her porridge and rice with him, thus reviving and refreshing him. He then continued his meditation and eventually became enlightened.

In later centuries, the common feature of the Laba Festival for Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike was the preparing, sharing, and consumption of porridge (or congee). By the 11th century, the Laba festival had become a national holiday. Chinese rulers characteristically gave porridge to their underlings and would send rice and fruits to the Buddhist monks.

In Japan, Buddha's enlightenment was celebrated as Bodhi Day, which has since the Meiji Restoration (1862–1869) been observed on December 8. Services held on this day will typically center on the Buddha's experience of Nirvana, and attempt to draw contemporary implications for it. Individuals may engage in meditation, study the Buddha's

teachings, chant Buddhist holy books (sutras), or engage in acts of kindness. Japanese Zen Buddhist centers may offer an intense period of practice (termed a *sesshin*) for a week or more before Bodhi Day, and then on the eve of the holiday, Zen monks and lay practitioners will often stay up all evening engaged in meditation.

Edward Allen Irons

See also Laba Festival; Nehan; Ploughing Day; Wesak/Vesak.

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Bodhidharma Day (October 5)

Bodhidharma (ca. 470–ca. 534), a.k.a. Da Mo in Chinese or Daruma Daishi in Japanese, is renowned in Buddhist circles as the fabled First Patriarch of the lineage from which most Chan and Zen Buddhist teachers trace their authority.

He is also the reputed originator of the modern discipline of Kung Fu. In spite of his prominence, however, relatively little is actually known about him. He is said to have been born in southern India, the third son of a king, around the year 470 CE. Traditionalist practitioners of Zen see him as transmitting a lineage of meditative masters reaching back to the Buddha.

Bodhidharma seems to have spent most of his life in northern China as a wandering monk, and at some point, practiced meditation with the requisite time and intensity to attain enlightenment. According to one story, he meditated for nine years, during which time his leg muscles atrophied, an unverified legend that led to the creation of Japanese *daruma* dolls that always resume an erect sitting position when tipped over.

It would be a Zen master, Shen Hui (684–758), who would transform what was at the time just another small Chinese Buddhist sect into one of Buddhism's most vigorous branches. His advocacy of Bodhidharma as the transmitter of the lineage from India to China established a context in which many stories about Bodhidharma would be published and later embellished. The stories about Bodhidharma, many of which may carry a core of historical truth, begin with his arrival in China. Reportedly, the emperor Wu Di, a Buddhist, met with Bodhidharma at Nanjing, but remained unconvinced that the temples Bodhidharma was starting to build were worth receiving the emperor's approbation.

The most famous stories tied to Bodhidharma relate to his wandering into the Song Mountains, where he found the Shaolin Temple. He taught the monks Chan meditation, but equally important, upon observing their relatively poor physical condition, he developed a program of physical techniques designed to strengthen their bodies. The regimen allowed them not just to survive, but to thrive in the rather isolated location where they had chosen to live. These techniques evolved into what is today called Kung Fu (or *gongfu*), the fountainhead of all other martial arts.

On October 5, Chan and Zen centers worldwide pause to remember Bodhidharma as the first patriarch of modern Chan and Zen Buddhism, and the 28th master in the lineage of meditative Buddhism that begins with Gautama Buddha. Zen, being the disciplined tradition that it is, has not been known for festivals and celebrations, and recognition of the day is somewhat subdued. Some observe the day as a time for extended meditation broken by the chanting of Buddhist sutras. Many Western zendos, however, use the day to invite members and their families to the zendo for socializing and a meal together.

Edward Allen Irons

See also Hyakujo Day Observance; Linji/Rinzai Day Observance.

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Bok Kai Festival

The Bok Kai Temple in Marysville, California, is a unique worship center, having survived from the era of the Gold Rush of the 1850s when many people from southern China, especially Guangdong province, braved the Pacific in search of fortune. As a Chinese community developed at Marysville, they found themselves treated as second-class residents—unable to own land or participate politically and no hope of becoming citizens. They were pushed to the outskirts of the larger community, along the edge of the river.

On the river's edge, they were able to build a temple to house a spectrum of deities, though the temple was dedicated to Bok Kai, generally a lesser deity associated with the north and with water. His task was to prevent floods. The original temple was built in 1854 but was destroyed in 1866 when a major flood hit Marysville. It was rebuilt in 1880 and remains to the present as an active temple, the only one to survive on the gold fields. Additional gods present in the temple include the ubiquitous Guan Yin and a variety of traditional deity figures from southern China, each with an ability to assist worshippers with various concerns including travel, children, and wealth, including such popular deities as Kuan Kung and the ever-present earth god.

Each year on the second day of the second month of the Chinese lunar year (February–March on the Common Era calendar), the temple joins with the Chinese community of Marysville and the Marysville/Yuba County Chamber of Commerce to celebrate Bok Kai's birthday with a two-day event popularly referred to as Bomb Day celebration, which marks Bok Kai's birthday. The name comes from the inclusion of fireworks as an essential part of the celebration, some of which, when shot into the air, contain good fortune rings which are sought after by those desirous of a lucky charm for the next year. Chinese Americans from across the country attend, as do an increasing number of non-Chinese tourists. The event includes a parade highlighted by the popular Lion Dancers, a fashion show and touring of the temple, now of extreme historical value. The event also serves as a fundraiser for the ongoing maintenance, preservation, and restoration of the temple.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Tam Kung Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Boniface of Germany, Saint's Day of St. (June 5)

Boniface (ca. 675–754), the early Christian missionary to Germany, was born in Wessex, England, and as a young man, became a Benedictine monk at Nursling. Early in his career, he joined Willibrord in evangelizing the Norse tribes in Holland, Germany, and Denmark. He developed a reputation after cutting down a sacred oak tree to demonstrate its lack of supernatural power.

In 716, Boniface tried unsuccessfully to spread Christianity in Frisia (modern Holland). Then while in Rome, he was commissioned by Pope Gregory II (r. 715–731), who commissioned him to evangelize German tribes along the upper Rhine. Accompanied by Willibrord, he returned to Germany, where legend says he singlehandedly cut down the sacred Oak of Thor/Odin near Greismar in Hesse. He then mounted the stump and challenged those watching him, “Where is your god? My God is stronger.” Some claim that he felled whole copses of oaks throughout northern Europe, which became a common practice of Christian missionaries as a step in weaning the population away from their nature-based deities.

Boniface established churches and monasteries throughout Germany, most notably the Abbey of Fulda, in Hesse, Germany, which still exists. He was eventually named as bishop over the land he had won to Christianity. After the death of French ruler Charles Martel (r. 737–743), Boniface called a series of synods to reform of the Frankish church. Pope Zachary (r. 741–752) named him archbishop of Mainz in 746, but rather than settling down, he was soon out in the field again attempting to expand the work of the church further north. He was killed in 754, and he was buried at the Abbey of Fulda.

He later received the title the Apostle of Germany and was named one of the patron saints of the area. His feast is June 5, and is carried on the calendars of both the Church of England and the Lutheran Church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ansgar, Saint's Day of St.; Augustine of Canterbury, Saint's Day of St.; Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.

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Bon Matsuri. See Obon Festival(s)

Boun Kao Phansa. See Asalha Puja Day

Boun Ok Phansa

In the early centuries of the Buddhist movement, and to this day in Southern Asia, especially Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, much of the life of the Buddhist community revolves around the Vassa or Rains Retreat. For three months each year, the monks ceased their travels and routines and settled in one spot as the rainy season made being outside uncomfortable and moving about the countryside difficult. During the three months, the monks gather at their temple/monastery and cease their normal daily routine. Many engage in periods of intense meditation, and they are often joined in their retreat by pious laypeople.

Both the beginning and end of the three-month retreat have become times of widespread celebration. As at the beginning, the Boun Ok Phansa celebration (also called Pavarana Day) at the end of the retreat, which occurs on the 15th day of the 11th month of the lunar calendar (in October on the Common Era calendar), is marked by visits to the local temples, worship services that include discourses by the monks and the chanting of Buddhist sutras, and candlelight processions. Unlike the specific events in the Buddha’s life that are referenced at the beginning of the retreat period, there are no events that marked its ending.

The most intense celebrations occur along the major rivers, especially in Thailand at Nakhon Phanom on the Mekong River and in Ubon Ratchathani on the Mun River, and in Laos at Luang Prabang on the Mekong. Here, believers launch thousands of tiny boats (though some may be as large as 8–10 meters), made from banana leaves and decorated with candles, incense, and flowers, and allow them to float lazily down the river. Picking up elements of pre-Buddhist thought and practice, the boats honor the life and prosperity that comes from the rivers and acknowledge the deities that are believed to inhabit them. In the larger festivals, boat races have been organized as part of the activities.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Abhidhamma Day; Obon Festival(s); Vassa.

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Bridget, Saint's Day of St. (July 23)

Saint Bridget (1303?–1373), a Swedish saint who was later named a patron saint of Europe, grew up in a wealthy family related to the Swedish king Magnus IV (1316–1374). She married a member of the court at the age of 13 and eventually bore eight children. Bridget had been religious since childhood, and had reported a number of visions.

In the years 1341–1343, she and her husband went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in northeast Spain. A year after their return, he died. After his death, she adopted the strict life of a penitent. She was able to talk the king into an endowment, which she used to found the Order of the Holy Savior, popularly referred to as the Brigittines. Their headquarters was at Vadstena, near Lipkoping, Sweden.

In 1350, the pope declared a jubilee year, which included promises of a number of benefits to those who made a pilgrimage to Rome. Bridget made the pilgrimage to Rome, a major consideration being the obtaining of formal papal authorization of the new order. She also had developed a mission to elevate the moral climate of her time, which included attempting to reform what she saw as abuses in the church. The several popes delayed confirming the order from year to year, and it would be 1370 before Pope Urban V (r. 1362–1370) finally approved it. Meanwhile, she developed a large following in the city among people who appreciated her earnestness, good works, and general demeanor.

She made a final pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1373, shortly before she died on July 23, 1373. She was originally buried in Rome, but her body was later transported to Sweden. The impact she made in Rome was demonstrated by the swiftness of her canonization, made in 1391 by Pope Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404). It was later confirmed by the Council of Constance in 1415. There were successive discussions about her many visions, and in 1436, the Council of Basel ruled approvingly on their orthodoxy.

Bridget was able to pass along her piety to some extent, her daughter Catherine of Vadstena also being named a saint. Her feast day was not included by Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572) in the Tridentine liturgical calendar, but she was added in 1623 and October 7, the day of her canonization, assigned as the day for celebration (moved to October 8 in 1628). It remained in October until the wholesale revision of the calendar of saints in 1969. In 1999, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) named Bridget along with Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) and Edith Stein (1891–1942) as co-patronesses of Europe.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Catherine of Siena, Saint's Day of St.; James the Greater, Feast Day of St.; Jubilee Year.

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Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St. (February 1)

Saint Brigid of Ireland (c. 452–c. 524) was a fifth-century nun who founded the Abbey of Kildare, built on a site formerly used for Pagan worship. Her monastery, which took its name from the oak trees in the area, was unique in welcoming both monks and nuns, with Brigid serving as their superior. The monastery was important to the conversion of Ireland and remained a key Christian center until the 16th century and the rise of Protestantism.

Little is known of Brigid beyond her leadership of the monastic community and the good reputation she generated in succeeding centuries. There are a number of miracles attributed to her, and there is Saint Brigid's Cross, a unique variation on the Christian symbol said to have originally been plaited from rushes by the saint while explaining the Christian message to a dying Pagan. To this day, the cross is placed over passageways to protect people from illness or bad luck.

The feast day of Saint Brigid is celebrated on February 1, the traditional date of her death, throughout Ireland, but especially in Kildare. Farmers honor it as the first day of spring and the beginning of the agricultural year. Traditionally, it would be a day to replace the old Saint Brigid's Cross with a new one freshly woven from the rushes. She is considered one of the patron saints of Ireland.

J. Gordon Melton



Stained glass image of Saint Brigid of Kildare in a Catholic church in Dublin, Ireland. (Shutterstock)

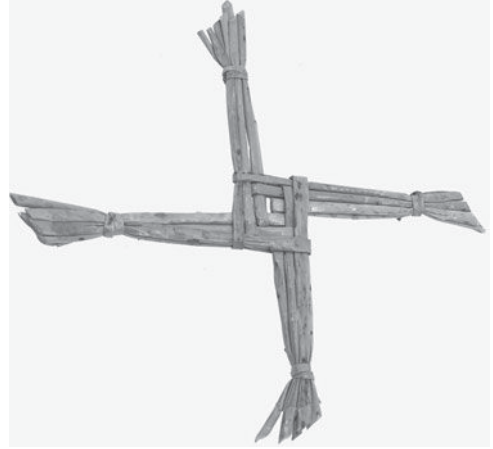
See also Columba, Saint's Day of St.; Imbolc; Saint Patrick's Day.

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Saint Brigid's cross is a traditional symbol of Saint Brigid. (Bob Keenan/Dreamstime.com)

Buddha Purnima. See Wesak/Vesak

Buddha's Birthday. See Wesak/Vesak

Buddha's Enlightenment. See Nehan

■ Buddhism

Today's approximately 400 million Buddhists can look back on 2,500 years of history with diverse developments and a wide spectrum of cultural expressions. Although the different traditions emphasize specific concepts, practices, and lifestyles, all Buddhists relate back to these three fundamental principles: the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Order. They call these principles the three "Jewels" or "Germs" of Buddhism.

It is generally assumed that Buddha Shakyamuni lived from 560 to 480 BCE; however, scholars have provided good evidence to adopt as the lifetime of the historical Buddha the span between 448 and 368 BCE, within a margin of 10 years. The name "Buddha" is an honorific title meaning "the Awakened One." Born as Siddhartha Gautama in a royal family in a region of northern India (in Lumbini, now southern Nepal), Siddhartha spent his childhood and youth in luxury. He was married at age 16 and became the father of his son Rahula 12 years later. Upon leaving—and while away from—the protected world of the palaces, the "four sights" provoked a major change in the course of his life. The 29-year-old saw

an aged man bent by the years, a sick man scorched by fever, a corpse followed by mourners weeping, and a mendicant ascetic. Becoming aware of the transitoriness of life, Siddhartha left the palace and became a wandering monk. In those days, monks and ascetic orders commonly sought to find and teach final solutions to the human sufferings of old age, sickness, and death, and their perpetual recurrence. For six years, Siddhartha engaged in strict practices of asceticism designed to deny the pleasures of the senses. When that severe self-denial failed to bring the solution desired, he withdrew to a balanced form of asceticism, called the Middle Path. This approach avoids the extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence. At the age of 35, while meditating in a resolved manner under a tree known as the Bodhi Tree (*figus religiosa*), Siddhartha attained enlightenment (Skr./Pali, *bodhi*). In Buddhist accounts, here at Bodh Gaya, he became “awakened” from the sleep of delusion—that is, from the ignorance that binds living beings to the suffering of this world.

From now on, the homeless ascetic was called “the Buddha,” the Enlightened or Awakened One. Buddha spread his insight and the teaching of the Middle Path through conversation, parable, and speech. He preached for 45 years in northern India, where he founded an order of monks and nuns. Laymen and laywomen supported the newly founded order by donating food and clothes and offering accommodations. For centuries, the Teachings were transmitted orally, and it was no earlier than about 300 years after the Buddha’s death that they were written down in Pali, and later in Sanskrit. Buddha did not nominate a successor. It was, rather, his Teachings that succeeded him, after the “extinction” of his physical death.

Buddha adapted the Vedic and Brahmanic concepts of rebirth and dependent origination—that is, the principle of cause and effect. According to those theories, the next life is dependent on the meritorious and bad deeds (Skt., *karma*) of the present life. In order to leave the endless cycle of rebirths (*samsara*), a practitioner would have to fully understand and follow the Buddhist teachings. Thus the aim of the teaching is to overcome the suffering or dissatisfaction (*duhkha*) that is caused by being imprisoned in the cycle of rebirths. The Four Noble Truths describe and analyze the existence of suffering and provide a way to extinguish it. According to Buddhist tradition, in his very first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath (near Benares), the Buddha had preached these Truths, a sermon later known as the “first turning of the Wheel of *Dharma*.” The truth of Suffering points to the fundamental reality that nobody is able to escape birth, old age, illness, and death. The truth of the Origin of Suffering states that desire (*tanha*) and thirst after life are the causes of suffering. The truth of the Cessation of Suffering says that it is possible to put an end to suffering by overcoming desire and thirst. The fourth truth, the truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering, consists of eight parts. Called the Noble Eightfold Path, it is pictured as an eight-spoked wheel, an important Buddhist symbol. This Path consists of: (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right conduct, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. For convenience and clarity, the Path’s eight components are

regrouped into three categories: wisdom (1 and 2), ethics (3, 4, and 5), and meditation (6, 7, and 8).

Basic to the Four Noble Truths and Buddhist teaching is that every existence is unsatisfactory (*duhkha*). This is because nothing has an enduring substance or self (*anatman*), because of the fact that everything is subject to change and is transitory in the final end (*anicca*). These three “characteristics of existence” are to be found in everything that is born and comes into existence. Clinging to the idea of a lasting satisfaction or something that is enduring in perpetuity is both desire and a false view—that is, ignorance (*avidya*). The Noble Eightfold Path provides practical advice and exer-

cises both to acquire an understanding of these principles and to embark on the liberating path to extinguish the “thirst” (*trishna*). This path is directed to reach the ultimate goal, *nirvana* (Skt.) or *nibbana* (Pali), the “blowing out” of the fire of desire and ignorance.

Strictly speaking, only the monks (*bhiksu*) and nuns (*bhiksuni*) constitute the members of the *sangha*, the Buddhist monastic order. They have undergone a formalized ordination and taken vows to live in celibacy and simplicity. Monks and nuns are responsible for preserving and passing on the teaching and providing the social context for its practice. The ordained are intended to serve as inspiring ideals to the laity and to teach them the dharma. The sangha is an autonomous body that is, ideally, self-regulating. There is no individual or collective body that can make decisions for the sangha as a whole. As a consequence, divisions according to different monastic rules (*vinaya*) and ordination lineages occurred, resulting in a variety of monastic traditions and schools (*nikaya*).

According to Mahayana Buddhist interpretation, however, not only the ordained, but also male and female lay supporters are a part of the sangha. All Buddhists, the ordained as well as the laypeople, take refuge in the “threefold refuge”: the Buddha, the Teachings (dharma), and the community (sangha). Tibetan Buddhists additionally take refuge in the teacher (Tib., *bla ma*, pronounced *lama*). All Buddhists promise to refrain from killing, stealing, undue sexual contacts, lying, and taking intoxicants. The ordained pledge themselves to numerous further self-disciplines, the number of precepts varying according to the monastic tradition to which they belong. In the southern tradition (Theravada), the monks have to observe 227 rules and the nuns 311.



Buddha in Sarnath, fifth century CE. (Library of Congress)

The Primary Buddhist Traditions

During the tradition's first two centuries of existence, a fair number of distinct branches or schools (*nikaya*) evolved. Of the various schools of so-called “early Buddhism,” the “school of the Elders,” the Sthaviravadin (Skt.) or Theravada (Pali), is the only one to have continued until today.

Around the beginning of the Common Era, the reformist movement of Mahayana Buddhism, the “Great Vehicle,” emerged within the Buddhist community in India. The followers of the Mahayana criticized the established schools to the effect that the ultimate goal of liberation was granted only to monks and nuns—that is, that the ordained ascetic, the self-sufficient *arhat* (Skt., “worthy”) was exclusively held to have attained nirvana. Pejoratively, they designated these schools as “Hinayana,” the Lesser Vehicle. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhists emphasized the ideal of the unselfish *bodhisattva* (Skt., “a living being committed to awakening”). The bodhisattva, though capable of reaching enlightenment, has delayed entering nirvana. Motivated by compassion for the suffering beings, the bodhisattva remains in the world in order to help these beings attain enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism also enhanced the status of laypeople, as it declared that not only as ordained, but also a layperson is able to become a bodhisattva. The new emphasis and interpretation praised itself as the “second turning of the Wheel.”

Responding to the new ideal and soteriological path, Shravakayana Buddhists laid emphasis on the view that it is only they who painstakingly had passed on the teaching of the Buddha. Advocates of the surviving Theravada tradition placed its legitimacy on the Pali-canon that was (and is) held to have preserved the “original” word of the Buddha. This canon was written down on palm leaves and collected in three thematic “baskets” (Skt.: *Tripitaka*). First is the basket of the monastic rules (*vinaya*); the second basket contains discourses attributed to the Buddha and his immediate disciples (*sutra*); the third basket consists of treatises expounding Buddhist doctrine in abstract and theoretical terms (*abhidharma*). Within early Buddhism, there had existed other collections with different text groups. The Pali Tipitaka of the Theravada school is the only surviving closed canon, first committed to writing in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka. Mahayana Buddhism refers not only to the Pali scriptures, but also to the sutras (teachings) written in Sanskrit and later translated into Chinese and Tibetan. This new genre of scriptures, among them the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, the *Saddharmapundarika* sutra, and the *Lalitavistara* were composed between the first and fifth centuries CE. They hold that the sutras present the teachings of the Buddha in a more appropriate way than the former texts.

Tibetan Buddhism looks upon the transplantation of tantric Mahayana Buddhism from northern India beginning in the seventh century onward as a “third turning of the Wheel.” The use of tantric practices that make use of bodily experiences, *mantras* (Skt., instrument of thought, sequence of sounds), and *mandalas* (Skt., circle) are based on late Indian Mahayana teachings. They are held to provide a quick path to final liberation. The *lama* plays a central role in guiding the

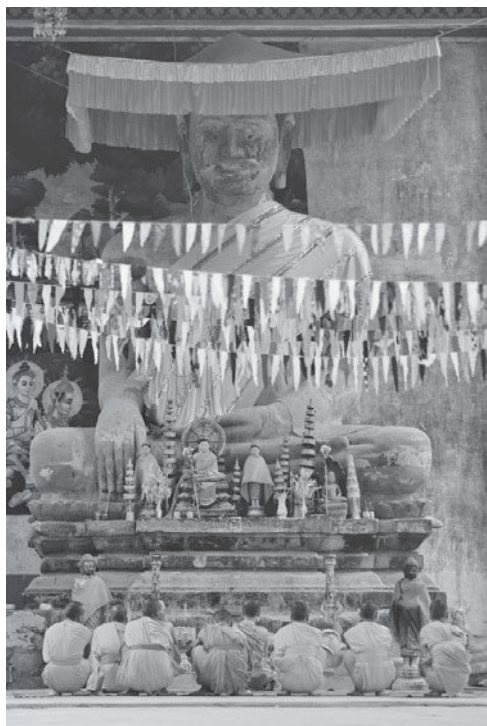
disciple and giving initiations. Like Mahayana Buddhism in China and East Asia, the self-designated *Vajrayana* (Skt., Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle) lays emphasis on the selfless actions of the bodhisattva. Its primary reliance is upon texts called *tantras* rather than upon the sutras. Emphasis is laid on meditation practices as visualizations and a characteristic type of liturgical meditation (Skt.: *sadhana*). While becoming established over a period of 500 years, a variety of syncretic forms evolved in absorbing native Bon concepts and rituals then current in Tibet. These forms remained basic, on a popular, lay-oriented level, with rites to accumulate merit, honoring local and personal tutelary deities, wearing protective amulets, conducting pilgrimages, and much more.

Finally, at the turn of the 21st century, Western Buddhists in North America and Europe began to outline the contours of a new, fourth *yana* (Skt., vehicle). According to them, the encounter of Western culture and Buddhist ideas, ethics, and practices is currently molded into a new Buddhism, self-consciously named the “fourth turning of the Wheel.” This *Navayana* (Skt., new Vehicle) or *Lokayana* (Skt., World or Global Vehicle) takes impulses from socially and politically engaged Buddhists, feminist interpretations of Buddhist concepts and practices, psychological and scientific approaches, and, last but not least, the meeting and encounter of Buddhist schools and traditions in Western localities.

Spread and Local Development

Buddha and the members of his order preached the dharma in northern India, and the community grew fairly rapidly. It gained support from the economically better-off strata of society. During the time of Ashoka in the third century BCE, the model of rulers who assumed the role of “righteous king” (*dharmaraja*) came into being. The spread of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet was greatly assisted by the patronage of Buddhist rulers. Also, with the encouragement of King Ashoka, Buddhist monks and nuns started to spread the dharma beyond the borders of his empire in northern and central India. The ordained reached the northwestern parts of the subcontinent, and from the first century onward, order members and Buddhist traders traveled from the Kusana Empire’s center, Bactria (today’s northern Afghanistan), to Chinese Turkestan.

In India itself, Buddhism blossomed with the development of the philosophical Mahayana schools of Madhyamika and Yogacara. Also, for the whole of the second half of the first millennium, the monastic University of Nalanda (in the north of India) became the center of learning. There and in other huge monasteries of the time, monks and nuns adhering either to schools of the Mahayana or Shravakayana lived side by side, following the same vinaya rules. The seventh century gave rise to tantric ideas and practices within Buddhism. This new emphasis, with its focus on mantras, body-based experiences, and ritual, brought Buddhism nearer to concepts and devotional forms current in Hindu traditions. The gradual absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism and the destruction of the Buddhist centers of learning by Muslim invaders in the 12th century brought about the end of



Buddhist monks gather before a giant statue of the Buddha at Cambodia's Angkor Wat. Originally constructed as a Hindu temple during the 12th century, Angkor Wat is today venerated by modern-day Buddhists. (iStockPhoto.com)

Buddhism in India as a lived religious tradition. In Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, however, the forms of Indian Buddhism survived and continued in culturally translated versions. It was no earlier than the late 19th century to the mid-20th century that Buddhism gained a new footing in its land of origin.

According to Buddhist tradition, the monk Mahinda, declared to be a son of Ashoka, brought Buddhism in its Theravada form in the mid-third century to the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Mahinda built a monastery in the capital, Anuradhapura, and propagated Buddhist teachings and practices at the court and among the elite. Of utmost symbolic importance, during this time, a cut from the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya was planted in the ancient capital. Later, the relic of a tooth of Buddha, venerated to this day, was brought in an annual grand procession to Kandy.

In the late 19th century, as Western technologies (such as the press), scientific concepts, and Christian missionaries arrived, a Buddhist revival gained momentum. Today, two broad strands of Buddhism—that is, modernist and traditionalist, or village-based Buddhism—exist side by side.

Burma/Myanmar

Theravada Buddhism was introduced to the Burmese region around the start of the Common Era, and it took a millennium for Buddhist teachings and practices to successfully penetrate the national consciousness. The conversion of the Burmese king Anuruddha (1044–1077) resulted in a lasting royal patronage of the Sangha. The disestablishment of the Sangha during the years of British rule in the late 19th century led to a revival of Buddhism and a renewed emphasis on meditation practices.

Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos

Traveling Buddhist monks and traders had introduced Mahayana Buddhism from India into Southeast Asia in the first millennium CE. In Thailand (then Siam),

Theravada Buddhism became powerful from the mid-13th century onward, also holding a paramount influence in Cambodia and Laos. In the mid-19th century, King Mongkut (1804–1868, r. 1851–1868), having been a monk for 27 years before ascending to the throne, established the Dhammayuttika (Thai, Tham-mayut) as the most influential school. This school follows a strict compliance with the monastic rules (vinaya), whereas a majority of monks and schools, summarized under the designation Mahanikaya (Thai, Mahanikai), opposed the imposed reforms. Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), continued the reform for a more standardized and Bangkok-centralized Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. The Sangha Act of 1902 created a sangha bureaucracy with a “supreme patriarch,” bringing the hitherto decentralized sangha with its diverse lineages into line with the civilian government hierarchy.

In contrast to this monastery-based Buddhism, the austere life of monks, living as wandering ascetics in the forest and dedicated to the practice of meditation, continued, and it even witnessed an efflorescence. In the early 1970s, new Buddhist foundations or movements, such as the Dhammakaya and the Santi Asoka, were formed, and Thai meditational practices and approaches of engaged Buddhism became globally known through the work of Ajahn Chah (1924–1993) and Buddhadasa (1906–1993). Parallel to these forms of “official” Buddhism, a multitude of “popular” Buddhist practices, such as healing, warding off malevolent spirits, and bespeaking protective amulets, persist and take importance for the laity.

Cambodia

In Cambodia, the monuments of Angkor Wat (12th century) provide evidence of the syncretism of Hindu and Indian Mahayana traditions, with the cult of the *devaraja* (Skt., divine king) forming the most important ritual. Then, from the 13th century onward, Theravada Buddhism was introduced and adopted by the royal Khmer court. Influences from neighboring Siam (Thailand) led to the adoption of a sangha-state relationship and its administrative structure following the Thai model.

Cambodian Buddhism experienced a watershed during the reign of terror of the Khmer Rouge (1975–1979), which attempted to annihilate all religious expression. Almost all the monks were murdered, the *wats* (Thai, temple-monastery) destroyed, and traditional Khmer Buddhism almost disappeared. Revival in the 1980s was slowed by the communist government installed by Vietnam in 1979. Restrictions were finally lifted in 1988, enabling the rebuilding of wats and ordaining Buddhist novices and monks.

Laos

Although the earliest traces of Buddhism in Laos date back to the 10th century, it was around 1350 that, with the creation of the kingdom of Laos, Theravada became the dominant religious tradition. Thailand exerted a strong influence through the 19th century. Buddhist practice was disrupted by French rule

(1893–1953) but revived during the two decades prior to the communist takeover in 1975. Buddhism lost much of its former dominance, but has continued amid notable restrictions.

China

Monks and pious laypersons from central Asia had brought Buddhist teachings and practices to China in the first century CE, but only during the period of political disunity (311–589) did it gain a footing, at least among the educated elite and higher aristocracy. The number of monastics and local temples rose considerably, so that with the reunification of China in 589, Buddhism had become an established religious community. During the Tang dynasty (618–906), Buddhist masters elaborated proper Chinese Buddhist traditions, mainly on the basis of Mahayana concepts. Zhiyi (538–597) advocated the centrality of the *Lotus* sutra and formed the Tiantai school. In the seventh century, Pure Land Buddhism (*Ching-tu*) developed, focusing on devotion and faith in Buddha Amitabha. Although the actual school reached the end of its life in the ninth century, it remained indirectly influential in the way that virtually all Chinese schools had accommodated aspects of it. In Japan, ideas of Pure Land Buddhism developed into proper schools from the 12th century onward. During the seventh century, Ch’an Buddhism arose as a blending of Chinese (notably Taoist) and Mahayana concepts and practices. The school emphasized meditational practice and developed a genealogical lineage of “patriarchs,” placing the sixth-century semilegendary Indian monk Bodhidharma in the position of its first patriarch. A variety of schools and branches developed in due course. In 13th-century Japan, Ch’an Buddhism was elaborated into different schools of Zen Buddhism—Soto and Rinzai.

Buddhist schools faced repeated oppressions during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1912). Monasteries were deprived of their privileges, and Buddhism steadily declined. In the early 20th century, a revival of Buddhism began, with the reformist monk Tai Hsu (or Taixu, 1890–1947) playing a leading role. The Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the establishment of the communist Chinese People’s Republic in 1949 brought an end to those activities. The Cultural Revolution (1965–1969) had a devastating effect on Buddhist clergy and institutions. Since the late 1970s, however, restrictions on religious activities have become less stringent, and in the new century, Buddhism has enjoyed some state support.

Republic of China (Taiwan)

Following the communist victory on mainland China, Buddhist monks and nuns moved to Taiwan in 1947 along with the Kuomintang. The Buddhist Association of the Republic of China was designed to represent all Buddhists in the republic. It mainly served to communicate the official politics (under the decades of martial

law) to the sangha and laypeople and to report concerns to the party. Restrictions were relaxed in the 1970s, and the 1989 Law on Civic Organizations removed the restrictions on all forms of Buddhist institutionalization and ordination. As a result, during the 1990s, a dynamic emergence of hitherto marginalized Buddhist movements occurred, and a half-dozen organizations have both gathered substantial support throughout the republic, as well as establishing branches globally.

Vietnam

Mahayana Buddhism entered Vietnam from China, and Theravada via the sea from India, during the first millennium CE. The flourishing of Buddhism, however, started with Vietnam's independence in the mid-10th century during the Dinh dynasty (968–980) and the later Ly dynasty (1009–1224). An evolved Vietnamese synthesis of Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism mixed with local creeds and customs, notably the cult of spirits and divine village patrons. The introduction of Roman Catholicism during the French colonial era (1860–1940) provoked a Buddhist revival movement in the 1930s. In 1951, Buddhist leaders formed the pan-Buddhist National United Sangha (Viet., *Tong Hoi Phat Giao Viet Nam*), superseded by the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBC) in 1963, one product of the division of Vietnam and the Vietnam War. With the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the reunification of the country under a Marxist government, Buddhism has faced severe restrictions, only slightly relaxed during the 1990s.

Korea

Buddhism was introduced from China at the three Korean courts in the late fourth century CE. The seventh century saw the unification of Korea under the royal house of Silla (688–917) and the sending of Korean monks for study in Tang China. All the Chinese Buddhist traditions subsequently gained a footing in Korea, though the popularity of Ch'an Buddhism led to the gradual absorption of most other schools. Under the Yi or Choson dynasty (1392–1910), neo-Confucianism gained status as the official ideology, leading to a steady decline and marginalization of Korean Buddhism.

Since the late 19th century and during Japan's annexation of the peninsula (1910–1945), Japanese Buddhist traditions such as the Nichiren Shoshu and the Jodo Shinshu sent their missionaries, the Tokyo government using religion as a tool of colonization. Following the Japanese capitulation, the communists took power in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, and Buddhism has come to an end as a lived and practiced tradition. In the south, successive pro- and anti-Buddhist regimes and strong competition from Christianity has provoked a revival of Buddhist traditions in the last generation, and the spread of Korean Buddhism internationally.

Japan

Buddhism entered Japan from Korea in the mid-sixth century, initially spreading as a foreign faith among the nobility. Using Buddhism to legitimate its rule, the ruling family built grand temples, dispatched envoys to China (607), and adopted Chinese script, art, and science. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the six Mahayana Chinese schools were introduced and evolved into uniquely Japanese institutions, some incorporating Shinto concepts. During the Heian period (794–1185), the Lotus sutra–based Tiantai school was introduced by Saicho (805) and the Chinese tantric tradition of Chen-yen by Kukai (806). The Tendai or Tiantai school or sect (Jap., *shu*) developed into the dominant religious tradition in Japan. Tendai perspectives were superseded in the mid-11th century by the apocalyptic notion of living in the final period of the dharma (*mappo*), during which only the invocation of the name of Buddha Amida would make possible entrance to the Western Paradise—that is, the “Pure Land.” Based on this picture, Honen (1133–1212) established the Jodo-shu, or Sect of the Pure Land, in 1175. His disciple Shinran Shonin (1173–1262), with a variant emphasis, founded the Jodo Shinshu, or True Sect of the Pure Land, in 1207.

During the early Kamakura period (1185–1333) additional Japanese Buddhist schools were set up. Following studies in China, the Tendai monks Eisai (1141–1215) and Dogen (1200–1253) brought to Japan the teachings and practices of Ch’an Buddhism, forming the meditational schools of Rinzai Zen and Soto Zen. Finally, in 1253, the Tendai-trained Nichiren (1222–1282) proclaimed that the title of the Lotus sutra embraced the essence of the whole sutra, and that the invocation of the title (*daimoku*) by way of uttering *namo-myoho-rence-kyo* (Homage be paid to the Lotus sutra of the Wonderful Dharma) would be sufficient to find enlightenment.

During the Muromachi period (1336–1573), the various Buddhist schools became firmly established, the Rinzai school being especially privileged. The Tokugawa or Edo period (1573–1867) saw the imposition of bureaucratic control of Buddhist temples and monasteries. Then, the Meiji period (1868–1912) saw Shinto return to power to the detriment of Buddhism. Meiji authorities pictured Buddhism as a foreign, non-Japanese element and forced reforms including an alignment to a revived nationalism. Beginning in the Taishō (1912–1926) and Shōwa (1926–1945) periods, Japan has witnessed a growing proliferation of Buddhist subsects, and the subsequent global spread of many of them to the West.

Tibet

Buddhism in its Indian, tantric Mahayana form, initially reached Tibet in the seventh century during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo (c. 618–650). The court adopted the Indian script, and the first Buddhist temple was erected in 653. Following the foundation of the first Buddhist monastery at Samye in 775, monks took residence and established the order of the Nyingma (adherents of the Old [Tantras]). A second transmission of Buddhism began with the arrival of the Indian

monk Atisa (982–1054) in 1042. Subsequently, the new orders of the Kadampa (later absorbed by the Gelukpa), the Sakyapa, and the Kagyupa with its various suborders (such as the Karmapa) were formed. Although the schools differed in their emphasis on specific teachings and methods of practice, they all followed the same monastic rule.

In the early 15th century, Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) established the reformist order of the Gelukpa. In 1577, the Gelukpa abbot Sönam Gyatso (1543–1588) converted the Mongolian ruler Altan Khan to Tibetan Buddhism. The ruler bestowed the honorary title of Third Dalai Lama (ocean of wisdom) on the abbot, thus establishing the lineage of reborn Dalai Lamas. With the support of the Mongolian ruler Gusri Khan, in the mid-17th century, the Gelukpa gained supremacy, and the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617–1682), became the undisputed master of Tibet.

Under the 13th Dalai Lama, Tupden Gyatso (1876–1933), Tibet gained political independence as the Manchu dynasty collapsed (1911). His efforts at reform of political and social life came to an abrupt end in the autumn of 1950 with the Chinese communist annexation of the country and the subsequent systematic suppression of religious life. In 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), fled to India and established a government-in-exile in Dharamsala. Over the last half century, efforts have been made unsuccessfully to free Tibet, and more successfully to recreate Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet, initially in India and more recently around the world, where a multitude of teaching centers, monasteries, and groups were founded.

Buddhism in the West

Currently, Buddhism in the West is experiencing an enthusiastic growth of interest and a dynamic proliferation of groups and centers.

Europe

During the 1880s, the first Europeans, self-converted by reading Buddhist treatises of the Pali canon, took up Buddhism as their guiding life-principle. Around the turn of the century, initial Buddhist institutions were founded, the first being the Society for the Buddhist Mission in Germany, established in 1903 in Leipzig. As Buddhism revived in South Asia, several European men were ordained as Buddhist monks, and began propagating Buddhist ideas back home. The few Buddhist converts came mainly from the educated middle strata, some from the upper strata of society.

After World War I (1914–1917), Buddhists in Germany and Great Britain started to take up religious practices such as spiritual exercises and devotional acts, while in other European countries, Buddhist activities remained low-key (if present at all) until the 1960s. After World War II, Europe experienced an influx of Mahayana traditions from Japan and a growing interest in meditational practice,

especially Zen. The Zen boom of the 1960s was followed by an upsurge of interest in Tibetan Buddhism since the mid-1970s. Within only two decades, a considerable rise in the number of Buddhist groups and centers on the side of convert Buddhists was noticed, while simultaneously, considerable numbers of Buddhists from Asian countries settled in Western Europe. Informed estimates speak of a million Buddhists currently living in Europe, two-thirds of whom are made up of Buddhists from Asia and their offspring.

North America

The intellectual approach toward Buddhism, dominant in Europe during the 19th century, also characterized the adoption of Buddhist ideas by American sympathizers and early-convert Buddhists. Initial interest expressed by transcendentalists Ralph W. Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry D. Thoreau (1817–1862) was continued by members of the Theosophical Society, and attendees at the World's Parliament of Religion in 1893. Parliament speakers Anagarika Dharmapala and Soyen Shaku presented Buddhism as a rational and scientific religion, though support among non-Asian Americans was minimal until after World War II.

In the 1950s, the lecture tours of Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870–1966) offered a modernist understanding of Zen Buddhism that found a response among artists, poets, and members of the counterculture. Following the change in immigration laws in 1965, a spectrum of Zen masters, Tibetan lamas, and Theravada bhiksus began to arrive.

Immigration of Chinese Buddhists began in California in response to the discovery of gold. Upon their arrival, Chinese temples were built, the first two in San Francisco in 1853. Throughout the American West, however, residents devalued East Asian culture as strange and incomprehensible. In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act restricted further immigration of Chinese nationals to the United States. Japanese immigrants during this time were treated little better. For their religious guidance, two Jodo Shinshu priests were sent to the United States in 1899, and the Buddhist Mission to North America (now the Buddhist Churches of America) was formally established in 1914. Following the setback during World War II, when 111,000 Japanese Americans faced forced internment, the Jodo Shinshu Buddhists have been more fully integrated into American life.

Following the change of U.S. immigration laws in 1965, the full spectrum of Buddhist traditions arrived from Asia (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), Korea, and Japan. Among these traditions and schools, one of the most vigorous groups turned out to be the Soka Gakkai International, which had reached a membership of more than a quarter of a million, by far the largest Buddhist group the United States and Canada. As of 2010, there were an estimated two million to three million Buddhists in North America.

Australia

The history of Buddhism in Australia begins with the arrival of Chinese immigrants in 1848 to work in the goldfields. During the 1870s, other workers came from Sri Lanka and Japan, and a Sinhalese Buddhist community came into being in 1876 on Thursday Island. Two Bodhi tree saplings were planted on the island, and Buddhist festivals were strictly observed. Around the turn of the century, Theosophist ideas caught an increasing interest among the better-educated citizens of the upper middle class. With the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, however, the community slowly began to disperse.

Slow growth in the early 20th century led to the formation of the first two convert Buddhist organizations, the Little Circle of Dharma in 1925 and the Buddhist Study Group in 1938, both founded in Melbourne. In 1958, the Buddhist Federation of Australia was formed as a national cooperative body; it still exists today. The 1960s and 1970s saw some development of the Buddhist community with the introduction of Japanese Mahayana traditions, especially, Zen, Jodo Shinshu, and Soka Gakkai; however, it would be the influx of more than 100,000 Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian refugees during the 1980s that proved to be decisive for Buddhism in Australia. The Buddhist community grew from 35,000 to 200,000 between 1981 and 1996, with the number of Buddhist groups and centers rising from 167 to 315 by the end of the century.

South Africa

Organized Buddhist activity in South Africa did not start until 1917, when the Indian Rajaram Dass established the Overport Buddhist Sakya Society and called low-caste Hindus working in Natal to embrace Buddhism in order to escape the degrading social and religious position imposed on them by Hindu custom. The Society peaked with some 400 families during the 1930s, and then slowly gradually declined. Buddhism then experienced a new beginning in the 1970s as small, local meditational groups were founded in the main metropolitan areas. The 1980s saw an influx of visiting U.S. and Asian teachers, with additional groups such as the Soka Gakkai and the Foguangshan order establishing themselves in the 1990s. Estimates on the number of Buddhists as the new century began range from 6,000 to some 30,000.

Buddhism has gained a footing in numerous other countries outside Asia, among them Brazil, Mexico, Ghana, Israel, New Zealand, and in Eastern Europe. A rapid growth in terms of founding groups and centers took place in the 1980s and 1990s in particular. Buddhism in the West is deeply marked by its plurality and heterogeneity. A multitude of schools and traditions have successfully settled in urbanized, industrialized settings. The presence of the main traditions of Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan Buddhism is heavily subdivided according to country of origin (for example, Laos, Burma, Sri Lanka, or Thailand), lineage (Gelukpa, Karma-Kagyü, Sakyapa, or Nyingma; Rinzai, or Soto), teacher (Asian

and Western, manifold), and emphasis on specific Buddhist concepts and practices. In addition to the publicly more visible convert groups, monasteries and societies established by Asian migrant Buddhists and their offspring have increasingly come to the fore and claimed recognition in the presentation of Buddhism. The marked plurality of Buddhism outside Asia has been intensified by the globalization of once-local organizations. The British-based Friends of the Western Buddhist Order or the France-based International Zen Association have spread worldwide. This applies also to various Zen and Vipassana organizations with teachers from the United States and prominent Vietnamese and Korean meditation masters. In a similar way, Tibetan Buddhist organizations have created global networks with lamas untiringly touring the globe. Apart from institutional aspects, Buddhists in the West work to adapt and change Buddhism as they place emphasis on lay practice and participation, critically evaluate women's roles, apply democratic and egalitarian principles, favor a close linkage to Western psychological concepts, conceptualize a socially engaged Buddhism, and create an ecumenical, nonsectarian tradition. The study of Buddhism in the West has grown into a subdiscipline of Buddhist Studies, and the 21st century will prove to be most fascinating in following up in what ways and directions a "Western Buddhism" and possibly a "fourth turning of the Wheel" will emerge.

Martin Baumann

See also Abhidamma Day; Amitabha's Birthday; Anapanasati Day; Asalha Puja Day; Bodhi Day; Bodhidharma Day; Butter Lamp Festival; Festival of the Tooth; Guan Yin's Birthday; Hana Matsuri; Higan; Kathina Ceremony; Losar; Nehan; Nichiren's Birthday; Oban Festival(s); Oeshiki; Sakya Dawa Festival; Shinran Shonin, Birthday of; Ullam-bana; Vassa; Wesak/Vesak; World Peace Ceremony.

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Buddhism—Cycle of Holidays

As Buddhism emerged in the centuries following the Buddha's parinirvana (death), it initially developed a set of holidays that focused upon the Buddha's earthly life, none more important than what has become known as Wesak (the name coming from the Indian month of Vaisakha). It was initially held that the Buddha was born, reached enlightenment, and attained Mahanirvana on the same day of the year, the day of the full moon (or purnima) in the month of Vaisakha (April–May on the modern Common Era calendar). In many parts of the Buddhist world, Buddha Purnima is still celebrated as an important holiday, and it is an official holiday across Southeast Asia from India and Sri Lanka through Bhutan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, to Hong Kong. The exact day that it is held varies from country to country, as it is still calculated on different local calendars. In Tibet, Wesak is celebrated as the Sakya Dawa Festival.

The importance of Wesak as a day for Buddhists is nowhere better demonstrated than occurrences in Vietnam in the spring of 1963. As the Vietnamese war progressed, the Catholic president of South Vietnam asserted his authority over the Buddhist community by prohibiting all display of religious flags. This disallowed the flying of the Buddhist flag, a relatively new symbol of Buddhism that had been approved only a decade previously by the World Federation of Buddhists. Vietnamese Buddhists took offense, since Catholics were still displaying the flag of the Vatican in celebration of the anniversary of the appointment of the president's brother as archbishop of Saigon (using government money), and no one moved to remove them. It was but another incident of government suppression of Buddhism, but one too many. On Phật Đản (as the Vietnamese call Wesak), Buddhists defied the ban on flag flying and gathered at Tu Dam Pagoda in Huế. The armed forces, called to disperse the crowd, fired at the demonstrators, killing nine and wounding others. The now-mobilized opposition of the Buddhist community led to a government coup.

In various places, Buddhists separated their celebration of the three events—Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and paranirvana—most noticeably in Japan. The Japanese celebrate Buddha’s birth (Hana Matsuri or Kambutsu-e) in the spring, his enlightenment (Wesak) in December, and his death (Nehan, or Parinirvana Day), in February.

Beyond, the three basic events, other events have offered themselves for memorializing. Possibly the most important was the Buddha’s deliverance of his first major public discourse, which occurred soon after his enlightenment (at Bodh Gaya) at Sarnath, in northern India. At this time, the Buddha laid out the basics of his new enlightened perspective and founded the community of monks (the Sangha), still the backbone of the Buddhist movement internationally. This event is sometimes referred to as the First Turning of the Wheel (of Dharma or teachings), a term applied to the propagation of Buddhism.

The second event widely memorialized is the rainy season in southern Asia. For three months each year (July to October), the monsoons made travel in India difficult, even dangerous, and the monks around Buddha settled down and used the time to learn, meditate, and generally work on their own self-development. It was a time for enforcing discipline in the Sangha and for new members to test their commitment. This practice is still followed in Theravada countries and is encompassed with celebrations of its beginning and conclusion, both for the Sangha and for the larger community.

During one of these retreat times, about seven years after his enlightenment, Buddha spent the time on a visit to the heavenly realm known as Tusita. He ascended there to share his teachings with both his mother and the being who inhabited the realm. He was there each evening (on earth) for three months and then made his descent with great pomp on a heavenly staircase. A shrine at Sankasia (Uttar Pradesh) marks the place where the Buddha touched down when he made his descent. It is that descent that has become a holiday for many Buddhists, especially in Southeast Asia (Abhidharma Day) and Tibet (Lha Bab Duchen).

Tibetans, somewhat isolated by geography and, at times, their own separatist tendencies, developed their own set of commemorations of the Buddha’s life, the Duchen festivals. They are four in number:

Sakya Dawa Duchen (Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death)

Chokhor Duchen (First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma)

Lha Bab Duchen (Buddha’s descent from heaven)

Sawa Dawa Duchen

The Sawa Dawa, or Butter Lamp Festival, is a uniquely Tibetan celebration of an incident in Buddha’s life where he bested a set of theological opponents. This later festival was established by the honored Lama Tsong Khapa in the 15th century.

Finally, following Buddha’s death, his body was cremated. From the ashes, bone fragments were recovered and preserved as Buddhist relics initially distributed among a set of royal disciples. These relics, now multiplied, are popularly displayed in countries wherever Buddhism has established itself, and in some locations, the annual display of the relics (or the reliquary in which they are kept) has become a large event. No display of a relic is more heralded than the lavish Festival of the Tooth, in honor of the most valued relic in Sri Lanka, but a variety of lesser events occur worldwide.

Mahayana Buddhism has added a second set of Buddhist holidays in celebration of the many bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are usually seen as real human beings who have successfully pursued the Buddhist path and found enlightenment, but who in service to humankind, have not entered nirvana (the highest heavenly state), but have dedicated their existence to see that others make it to enlightenment. There are thousands of bodhisattvas, but only a relative handful have become popular at a national or international level. Those bodhisattvas have acquired a biography and have been assigned a birthday, a practice that became notable in China, where the numerous deities of traditional Chinese religion, many of whom were alive in historical time, have been celebrated on their birthday. In fact, many of the Buddhist bodhisattvas will show up on the altars of traditional Chinese temples, most notably Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy.

The birthdays of the Mahayana bodhisattvas, widely venerated across China (including Tibet and the lands of Chinese diaspora), Japan, and Korea, form a secondary Buddhist calendar not unlike the calendar of saints in Christianity. Major bodhisattvas include (but are by no means limited to):

Bodhisattva	Known in Japan As	Birthday
Amitabha	Amida	December 23
Guan Yin	Kannon	September 19
Ksitigarbha	Jizo	c. July 13
Mahasthamaprapta	Seishi Bosatsu	July 13
Manjushri	Monju-bosatsu	May 6
Medicine Buddha	Yakushi-nyorai	October 26
Samantabhadhara	Fugen-bosatsu	March 25

The birthdays of the bodhisattvas are set on the Chinese lunar calendar, and hence are celebrated on different days each year. Japan moved to a Western solar calendar in the 19th century, and the birthdays of the more popular bodhisattvas were assigned a birthday close to the day previously celebrated on the lunar calendar.

There are a variety of additional local Buddhist holidays. Sri Lankan Buddhists, for example, celebrate the reputed visit of the Buddha to their island. Additionally, a few founders of Buddhist sect groups, Shinran Shonin (founder of Pure Land Josdo Shinshu) or Kobo Daishi (founder of Shingon Buddhism) are celebrated

by the group they founded, but such celebrations are not as common as in contemporary Hinduism.

Even with all the many local festivals, Buddhists have far fewer holidays and special days on the calendar than either Hindus or Christians.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Abhidamma Day; Amitabha's Birthday; Anapanasati Day; Asalha Puja Day; Bodhi Day; Bodhidharma Day; Butter Lamp Festival; Chokhor Duchen; Festival of the Tooth; Guan Yin's Birthday; Hana Matsuri; Higan; Kathina Ceremony; Lha Bab Duchen; Losar; Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday; Nehan; Nichiren's Birthday; Obon Festival(s); Oeshiki; Sakya Dawa Festival; Samantabhadhara's Birthday; Shinran Shonan, Birthday of; Ullam-bana; Vassa; Wesak/Vesak; World Peace Ceremony.

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Buddhist Churches of America Founding Day

The Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), one of the largest Buddhist associations operating in the United States, traces its beginning to the period of Japanese immigration in the late 19th century. Many Japanese left their homeland under the ideal of making money abroad and returning home with the fruits of their labor. An initial wave began arriving in Hawaii in the 1880s and moving on to

the West Coast cities in the next decade. As the number of Japanese residing in California grew, a petition was sent to the head temple of the Honpa Hongwanji Buddhists, the largest Buddhist group in Japan, to send a priest to assist in the establishment of a Buddhist temple. Once approved, the Hongwanji sent two missionary priests, Rev. Dr. Shuye Sonoda and Rev. Kakuryo Nishijima, to San Francisco. The pair arrived on September 1, 1899, and organized a Buddhist mission in San Francisco. This date is now officially recognized as the founding date of the BCA.

The date is commemorated annually in the local churches (temples) of the BCS and periodically by the national organization. The 75th and 100th anniversaries were, for example, the occasion of issuing souvenir histories of the organization.

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See also Eshinni-Kakushinni Memorial; Obon Festival(s); Shinran Shonin, Birthday of.

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Burning of Judas

Among the unofficial Holy Week activities in a number of Roman Catholic countries, especially in Central and South America, is the symbolic burning in effigy of Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus to the Romans. Judas was said to have in the end returned the money he was paid and then committed suicide by hanging. The practice was once widespread in Europe, in both Catholic and Greek Orthodox lands, and is still found in Catholic Spain and Portugal and in Orthodox Greece and Cyprus. It has remained strongest in Latin America, especially Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and Uruguay.

The Burning of Judas emerged as an expression of collective anger and became a socially acceptable way of acting on it and dissipating it. It was also widely practiced as an end-of-the-year event in which the sins and anger of the past year could be placed on the symbolic focus of such anger and burned away. Surviving practices have integrated the event into the ritual dramatization of the events of Holy Week. Thus along with official church services, crowds will gather in public squares to first hang (usually on Good Friday), otherwise abuse the effigy (on Saturday), and finally burn it (on Easter Sunday).

Observers have noted the intense anger and violence expressed in the popular happening. In many places, the Judas effigy will take on the image of a popular contemporary villain and become a statement on issues immediately before the

public. Celebrants in 2008 in Venezuela, for example, burned a representative executive of the oil corporation Exxon, then in a fight against the nationalization of the oil industry by the country's president Hugo Chavez. Local politicians who fall out of favor may find themselves pictured on the face of the next Judas to be burned.

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See also Easter; Good Friday; Holy Week.

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Butter Lamp Festival

The yak has been central to Tibetan life for millennia. The butter made from yak milk is both consumed as food and used as fuel to provide light. In the 11th century, the eminent Buddhist scholar and monastic leader Tsong Khapa (1357–1419 CE), who founded the reformed or Gelugpa school of Buddhism, initiated an annual celebration of Gautama Buddha, Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival. As the a element of the festival, held immediately after the annual New Year's festival (called Losar), from the 4th to the 11th days of the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, people will carve a variety of often elaborate statues with themes drawn from both nature and religion and place these on display for the public's enjoyment. The statues (called *tormas*) will be illuminated by butter lamps.

The celebrations of Losar and Monlam will continue until the full moon (the 15th day of the month). That day is now designated as a commemorative day for celebrating the life and work of Tsong Khapa. The day's activities begin with a ritual performed in the temple. For centuries, the primary celebration of Monlam would center on the Jopkhang Temple near the Potala Palace in Lhasa, and at the large square in front of the temple. Since the 1950s and the dispersion of the Tibetans both throughout China and around the world, both Monlam and the Butter Lamp Festival are celebrated worldwide. Today, some of the largest celebrations are now held at the Labrang monastery in Xiahe, the site of the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the People's Republic of China outside Tibet, and in Dhar-masala, India, where the Dalai Lama resides.

The Butter Lamp Festival includes a full day of *cham* dancing, theater, and music accompanied by traditional instruments including cymbals, drums, gongs,



Butter lamps are fueled by yak butter and used to illuminate events during the Buddhist Butter Lamp Festival. (Braden Gunem/Dreamstime)

flutes, oboes, and brass trumpets. It will climax with a giant bonfire in which the many butter statues will be placed. The passing of the beautiful images, which take many months to prepare, are destroyed as a symbol of the impermanence of everything in the visible world.

The 15th day of the first month of the Tibetan year is also celebrated as Chotrul Duchen, one of the four festivals remembering events in the Buddha's life. In this case, it references a unique time in the Buddha's life, when for 15 days he performed a number of miracles as part of his interaction with six rival teachers. Chotrul Duchen actually commemorates the final day of the miraculous display. It is believed by many that the virtue created on this day is magnified millions of times.

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See also Chokor Duchen; Losar; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; Sakya Dawa Festival.

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Calendars, Religious

Before human communities developed a written language, they developed methods to divide time and thus to regulate the initiation and culmination of important processes in their lives, commemorate significant events, and gain some predictive control over the future. A variety of factors were used to reckon time, the passing of the seasons, the noting of wet and dry periods, or the blooming of certain plants and the behavior of animals. Of course, very early, the observation of the sun and moon provided markers, and as observation of the heavens became more sophisticated, something like a calendar came into being. The diversity of the calendars found around the world suggests that they arose locally, rather than spread globally by a process of diffusion. Like religion itself, calendars were constructed to serve a variety of local needs.

The calendar that is now used by most countries of the world and is used to what we term the Common Era (CE) and the period Before the Common Era (BCE) has its roots in ancient Egypt. The Egyptian, like most calendars, began as a lunar calendar and then evolved into a solar-lunar calendar of 360 days. By the eighth century BCE, the Egyptians had a calendar of 365 days, the extra five days being added at the end of the year. The high point annually in Egyptian society was the flooding of the Nile River, upon which the country's agricultural cycle was based. Those who observed the sky were aware of the temporal relationship of that event and the position of the sun and the star Sirius.

It was noticed in ancient Egypt that the flood came soon after the "helical rising" of the star Sirius. The helical rising of a star occurs on the day that it can first be observed in the Eastern sky at dawn. Over a year, the star will rise earlier and earlier until it can be observed setting at dawn. Following a period of 70 days when it is not visible in the sky at dawn, it will reappear again and the cycle repeated.

As calendars developed in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean basin, amid the many differences, some basic patterns emerged. The calendars were based on the solar cycle, which best coincided with the repeating seasons or periods of dry and wet. Then the moon tended to be used to mark off shorter periods, the precursors of the modern month. Various shorter periods of 7–10 days served as precursors to the modern weeks. Calendars also had to designate a starting point, and as they became more sophisticated, that starting point would be the primary difference between different calendars.

The development of the Egyptian calendar was affected by the various invasions of the land by the other nations who brought their calendars with them. For example, in the sixth century BCE, the Persians invaded Egypt and merged their calendar that had developed from the Babylonian calendar with the older Egyptian one.

Meanwhile, in Rome, a calendar, traditionally ascribed to the legendary Romulus, evolved with 10 months and space for additional days or months to fill out the 365 days of the solar year. Around 715 BCE, Numa Pompilius, then the king of Rome, carried out a calendar reformation and added two months bringing it up to 355 days. The Romans also divided the months by noting the first day, Kalends, the 5th or 7th day, the Nones, and the 13th or 15th days, the Ides. The Ides of March became famous as the day of Julius Caesar's assassination.

Relative to the modern world, the next step in the development of the calendar was the reform of Julius Caesar in 46 BCE. His reformation was unique in that he discarded reference to the moon and created a completely solar calendar. The year was calculated to be 365.25 days, with an extra day added every four years. Each month was assigned a specific number of days. The Julian calendar would hold for many centuries with some minor changes, including a slight reassignment of the number of the days given each month that occurred soon after Caesar's death.

Important for the religious West, in 324–325 CE, at its first major council in its new role as part of the ruling elite, and after leaving behind three centuries of living a somewhat clandestine life as a persecuted minority, the Christian church adopted the Julian calendar as its official calendar. The one significant change at this time was the changing of the point from which dates would henceforth be calculated. Year 1 would be marked from the birth of Jesus Christ. The years of the Christian era would be designated AD, or Anno Domini (or the year of our Lord).

The Council of Nicea, in adopting the Julian calendar, also moved to deal with a controversy that had plagued the Christian movement internationally, the setting of the date for Easter. Prior to the Council decision, most Christians agreed that it should be celebrated on Sunday, the day of the week on which all agreed the resurrection had occurred. The resurrection was also believed to have occurred close to the Jewish Pesach (Passover). Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan (which occurred in March or April on the Christian calendar), the first month of the Hebrew calendar's festival year. The 14th and 15th days of Nisan may occur on any day of the week.

It had been the practice of Christians to hold a pre-Easter fast. Thus the question became when the fast should conclude. The main body of Christians tended to end it on the Saturday evening before Easter Sunday. A large dissenting group, the Quartodecimans, wanted to end the fast on Nisan 14, whatever day it happened to fall, and begin the celebration of Easter the next day.

The Council created a formula for determining Easter. It would be set for the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring (or vernal) equinox. The spring equinox was seen as occurring on March 21. Julius Caesar arranged his

calendar so the spring equinox would occur in the month of March. For Christians, in the event that the day designated for Easter should occur on Nisan 14, Easter would be moved to the following Sunday so that it would never coincide exactly with Passover. This decision, for all practical purposes, settled the Easter day controversy. It also sets the date for the whole period in the liturgical calendar tied to Easter that most begins with Ash Wednesday and the launching of the pre-Easter Lenten fast and ends with Pentecost seven weeks after Easter.

The solution of the Council of Nicea worked fine for centuries, but the Julian calendar was based on a slight error, that the solar year was 365.25 days. This is close, but over the centuries, the vernal equinox wandered away from the day on which it was supposed to occur—March 21. Slowly, confusion again crept in, and by the eighth century, different dates were vying for the true Easter Sunday. It was not until the 16th century, however, that a meaningful step was taken to correct the problem. In 1582, following up on the reform-minded Council of Trent, Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585) assumed the power to correct the date of the drifting equinox by deleting 10 days from the calendar in October of that year, and making a change to prevent future drift by deleting three days from the calendar every four centuries.

The Gregorian calendar was quickly adopted in Catholic Europe, but it took some time for the dominantly Protestant countries to adhere to it. England (and its colonies in North America) did not accept it until 1752. From that time forward, as international communications and relations developed, the issue of the calendar was more and more taken out of religious hands and became the concern of the secular governments of the world. Crucial in the process was the 1884 International Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C. Chester A. Arthur, the president of the United States, called the conference, which was attended by delegates from 25 nations. At the conference, the delegates affirmed the desirability of designating a single world meridian from which to measure the beginning and end of the day and the need for all countries to adopt a universal day. That day would begin at midnight. The meridian was fixed at Greenwich in the United Kingdom. Henceforth, the universal day would be a Mean Solar Day that would begin at the Mean Midnight at Greenwich. It would be counted on a 24-hour clock. This decision was made by an assembly that included not only the United States and many Western European countries, but representatives from Brazil, Japan, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire from Turkey. Collectively, they welded significant power to move the world.

While the 1884 conference did not speak to the calendar issue directly, it was a major step in the development of international political control of the issues of dividing time in human society from the common calendar upon which businesses, airplanes and other forms of transportation, and communication systems operate, to the minute measuring of the second and its subdivisions that become important in subatomic physics, space travel, and personal computers. By this time, the Western calendar so rooted in Christianity was being used by so many nations that no other calendar seriously competed with it. It was the most precise available for use by the academic and scientific community, and it was taken as the one to be

further developed and used worldwide as the framework for such tasks as the writing of history, the holding of political conversations, and the coordination of international activities.

Among the countries that were most hesitant to accept the trends toward accepting the Gregorian calendar and supportive actions such as the decision of the International Meridian Conference were those lands where Eastern Orthodoxy was the dominant religion. Only one, Russia, sent delegates to Washington in 1884, and interestingly, it was the first of the Eastern Orthodox countries to accept the Gregorian calendar, though it took the revolution in 1917 to bring about the change. The other Orthodox lands soon followed, however, and in 1923, Greece became the last European country to accept it.

In spite of the countries with majority-Orthodox populations adopting the Gregorian calendar, no Orthodox church (with the exception of the Finnish Orthodox Church) has adopted it for liturgical calculations. Instead, in 1923, a new revised Julian calendar was proposed. It dropped 13 days from the Julian calendar as it then existed and made some future adjustments relative to leap year. The revised Julian calendar will work for the next centuries and has had the effect of bringing those Orthodox churches that use it in alignment with the Roman and Protestant churches on the date for celebrating Christmas, though not Easter.

The following Orthodox churches have adopted the revised Julian calendar:

Ecumenical Patriarchate

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

Orthodox Church of Cyprus

Orthodox Church of Greece

Romanian Orthodox Church

Bulgarian Orthodox Church

The following Orthodox churches continue to use the old Julian calendar:

Georgian Orthodox Church

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Orthodox Church of Macedonia

Orthodox Church of Poland

Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

Serbian Orthodox Church

All of the non-Chacedonian or Oriental Orthodox churches, which include the Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Syrian, Armenian, and Assyrian churches, have a

different calendar peculiar to them alone, though the result is that the fixed dates of their liturgical year, most notably the date for Christmas, aligns to the old Julian calendar. Old Calendarists formerly in the Church of Greece and the Romanian Orthodox Church have complained that the revised Julian calendar gives away too much to the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism, and they left to form Old Calendar churches.

Interestingly, Protestant churches, which have a much lower understanding of the sacraments than the Catholic and Orthodox churches, have since accepted the more pervasive Gregorian calendar and have had little to no discussion about it. They have tended to see calendar issues as more of a practical problem of coordinating different communities than an important theological consideration.

Alternate Religious Calendars

The evolved Common Era calendar has as its base, midnight, January 1 of the year 1 CE at Greenwich, England. Stated in such blatant terms, the secularization of the Gregorian calendar from which it evolved is evident. The Gregorian calendar, having been built upon the Julian calendar, also had other errors built in. Among them was a miscalculation by the church leaders gathered at Nicea in 324–325 on the date of the birth of Jesus, the event which the bishops saw as the date from which they would measure time. Most Christians now accept the notion that Jesus was probably born in 4 BCE, before the death of Herod the Great. (The issue of dating Jesus's birth—the year, month, and day—is a matter of contemporary inquiry from a variety of theological, biblical, and historical perspectives, but is now carried out from an assumed acceptance of the Common Era calendar.)

The widespread acceptance of the Common Era calendar for the major elements of secular life has had the effect of reducing its competitors to religious calendars still utilized for the calculation of major holy days and liturgical events. Where there are enough people following one religion in a single country, the calendar may have some day-to-day use, but it constantly has to be translated into the relevant date on the Common Era calendar. The Hebrew calendar is used in Israel, for example, for the conducting of all civil and religious events, while outside of Israel, it is used only for calculating religious observances. Such computations have become easier with the arrival of the computer and the circulation of tables that carry both the religious calendar and the Common Era equivalent. Several calendars remain of particular note—the Hebrew calendar, the Islamic calendar, and the Chinese calendar.

The Hebrew Calendar

Prior to the fourth century BCE, the Hebrew calendar remained in flux. It had become a lunar-solar calendar by the seventh century and then underwent significant adjustment during the years of the Babylonian Captivity, when agricultural events in Palestine could no longer be used as a reference point. The present

calendar reckons years by the sun and months by the moon. It is a sophisticated calendar and requires some work to understand it and even more to calculate its variations from year to year.

The calendar begins with a seven-day week, corresponding to the seven days of creation. A day is deemed to begin at sunset (rather than midnight). Creation is calculated as having occurred in what would be 3761 BCE. The year is defined as consisting of 12 months. A month, the time of a lunar cycle from new moon to new moon, is approximately 29-and-one-half days. Thus, most months alternate between 29 and 30 days. Two months are of variable length to assist in conforming the lunar movements with the solar year. Twelve months are still short of a solar year, so periodically, a 13th month is added to make up for lost days.

Years are grouped in cycles of 19. Every 19 years, the solar cycle and 235 lunar months converge, and begin again at the same starting point. Within that 19-year period, any given year may vary from 353 to 385 days. This variation allows for following rules concerning the setting of the major liturgical events.

The new year begins on the first day of the month of Tishri, which usually falls in September on the Common Era calendar (on rare occasions, it may fall on one of the last days of August). Rosh Hashanah (or the Jewish New Year) is celebrated on Tishri 1. Tishri 1 must be on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday; hence, the variation in the year's calendar begins with the designation of Rosh Hashanah. Passover occurs on Nisan 15 and Shevuot (or Pentecost) on Sivan 16. These two days must precede Rosh Hashanah by 163 days and 113 days, respectively. Also affecting the calendar are rules that Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) must not fall on Friday or Sunday and the Day of Tabernacles not fall on a Saturday.

The Jewish year begins with the calculation of Tishri 1. That day is designated as the day when the first sliver of moonlight appears after the dark of the new moon at the end of the previous year. In ancient times, the new month was determined by direct observation. When the new moon was seen, the religious authorities, the Sanhedrin, were immediately notified. When the observation was verified, the Sanhedrin would immediately declare that day, which had already begun at sunset, to be the Rosh Hashanah. They would then dispatch messengers to inform the people. This process would be repeated at every new moon, and the verified observation of the new light led to the declaration of *rosh chodesh* (first day of the month).

The Hebrew calendar has two beginning points. The years are numbered from Tishri to Tisri. However, the liturgical/ceremonial year begins in the spring with Pesach; hence Nisan is commonly referred to as the first month of the Jewish year. It is following the 12th month, Adar, that a 13th month is added in some years.

The Hebrew names for the 13 months are (1) Nisan, (2) Iyar, (3) Sivan, (4) Tammuz, (5) Ab, (6) Elul, (7) Tishri, (8) Heshvan, (9) Kislev, (10) Tevet, (11) Shevat, (12) Adar, and (13) Adar Beit. Using the liturgical year, the major holy days of the Jewish year are:

Nisan 15	Pesach (Passover)
Sivan 15	Shevout (Pentecost)
Tshri 1	Rosh Hashanah (New Year)
Tishri 3	Fast of Gedaliah
Tishri 10	Yom Kippur
Tishri 15	Shevuot
Tishri 21	Sukkot
Tishri 25	Simchat Torah
Kislev 25	Hanukkah
Adar 14	Purim

Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot are recognized as official holidays in Israel.

The Calendar of Islam

Islam begins its calculation of communal time with the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca and his arrival in Medina on what on the Common Era calendar is July 16, 622 CE. This event is known as the Heriga. The calendar is a straightforward lunar calendar, with 12 lunar months of approximately 354 days in the year. Thus, the Islamic lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, and the Islamic new year begins approximately 11 days earlier each year on the Common Era calendar. In the Qur'an (9:36–37), Allah prohibited use of an intercalary month, a common method of reconciling lunar cycles with the solar year. It should be noted that the major Muslim countries from the Middle East across North Africa are close enough to the equator as to be less tied to an annual agricultural cycle in which growing seasons would have to be calculated.

There is a seven-day week, one day of each (Friday in the Western calendar) is named el Jumah, the day of gathering. A day begins at sunset, as Muhammad entered Medina at that time. The week begins at sunset on el Jumah (the end of the light on Thursday on the Common Era calendar), and at noon on Friday, Muslims gather at the mosque for weekly communal prayer.

The lunar month is calculated to be 29 and one-half days and the 12 Islamic months alternate between 29 and 30 days. To account for the deviation of the moon's cycle from 29-and-one-half days, an extra day is added eight times every 30 years. As with other cultures, the beginning of the month was based on observation of the first light of the new moon. That could cause complications if the sky was cloudy.

The 12 Islamic months are named:

- Muharram
- Safar
- Rabi I
- Rabi II
- Jumada I

Jumada II
Rajab
Sha’ban
Ramadan
Shawwal
Dhu al-Qi’dah
Dhu al-Hijjah

The beginning of the Muslim year with Muharram was the suggestion of Uthman ibn Affan (c. 579–656), a companion of the Prophet and one of the four rightly guided caliphs who guided the early Muslim community. He suggested that it was a functional beginning point, as the believers would have just completed their pilgrimage to Mecca, and would be ready to begin a new year. Ramadan is venerated among Muslims as the month of the fast, the keeping of which is one of the five pillars of the faith. During that month, the faithful are required to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sex through the daylight hours.

Important Dates in the Islamic Calendar

Muharram 1	Islamic New Year
Muharram 10	Ashura
Rabi I 12	Mawlid an Nabi
Rajab 27	Laylat al-Mir’aj
Sha’ban 15	Laylat ul Bara’ah
Ramadan 1	The fast of Ramadan begins
Ramadan 27	Nuzul Al-Qur’an
Shawwal 1-3	Id al-Fitr
Dhu al-Hijjah 8–10	The Hajj or annual pilgrimage.
Dhu al-Hijjah 10–13	Id al-Adha

In addition to the holidays celebrated by all Muslims, there are important additional dates recognized by Shi’a Muslims, including:

Muharram 10	Ashura, martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali and his followers.
Rajab 13	Birthday of Ali ibn Abi Talib
Rabi I 17	Mawlid an Nabi, or Muhammad’s birthday
Ramadan 21	Ali ibn Abi Talib’s Martyrdom

Because of the way that the beginning of the month and year were calculated, the day for celebrating holidays would often vary a day or two from country to country. This issue was not as important in centuries past, except for the day for the Hajj, which began on the date on the Saudi Arabian calendar. It was customary for Middle Eastern countries to look to Cairo for the setting of the beginning of the month. With the movement of Islam around the world and the improvement of communication, the desire for a uniform calendar grew. It was also the case that

waiting each month for the determination of the new moon placed some limits on long-term planning. Thus in the 20th century, an at-times heated discussion on the use of astronomical calculation to preset the Muslim calendar has been debated. While a majority of Muslim clerics appear to oppose replacing actual observation with such calculations, a growing minority have adopted them.

Chinese Calendar

Possibly the oldest calendar still in use is the Chinese calendar. It traces its beginning point of measuring time to what on the Common Era calendar is 2953 BCE. In looking at the heavens, Chinese astronomers described three roads through the heavens. The Red road is equivalent to the equator. The Yellow road is the path in which the sun appears to travel. The third, or White road, is the path traversed by the moon. The starry background was divided into 12 segments, the houses of the zodiac. Each division of the zodiac was designated by the 12 places to which the stars of the Big Dipper point during the 12 months of the year. The 12 signs of the zodiac were named for 12 animals.

The Chinese calendar was divided into 60-year cycles, each taking its designation from 1 of the 12 Zodiac signs combined with the 10 celestial signs, also called the Heavenly Stems. The calendar came to the fore during the Shang dynasty (1766–1122 BCE). The Shang people posited 10 suns that appeared in the sky in a 10-day cycle. The Heavenly Stems were the names of the 10 suns. Over the centuries, they developed a variety of connotations.

The 12 Signs of the Zodiac		The 10 Heavenly Stems
1. Rat	zǐ	1. jiǎ
2. Ox	chǒu	2. yǐ
3. Tiger	yín	3. bīng
4. Rabbit	mǎo	4. dīng
5. Dragon	chén	5. wù
6. Snake	sì	6. jǐ
7. Horse	wǔ	7. gēng
8. Ram	wèi	8. xīn
9. Monkey	shēn	9. rén
10. Rooster	you	10. guǐ
11. Dog	xū	11. jiǎ
12. Pig	hài	12. yǐ

To create the 60-year cycle, the 12 signs of the zodiac are repeated five times. Then the 10 Heavenly Stems are repeated in order six times, and the signs and stems are paired in what become 60 combinations, at which point the combinations begin to repeat. Thus, the first year becomes zi-jia, and the 11th xu-jia. There is a second system for getting to the 60 years by replacing the 10 Heavenly Stems with the five elements—wood, fir, earth, metal, and water.

Any particular year on the 60-year cycle begins on the new moon nearest to the 15th degree of Aquarius. The Chinese New Year will thus be two weeks before or after February 5 on the Common Era calendar. The year following will then be divided in 12 lunar months and further subdivided into 24 periods of approximately 15 days each (each period marking a move of 15 degrees around the zodiac). As the beginning of the year might move two weeks in either direction, so each date in the calendar would also move accordingly. On a year in which the New Year occurs on February 5, the 24 periods would be:

February	5	Spring Begins
	19	The Rain Water
March	5	The Excited Insects
	20	The Vernal Equinox
April	5	The Clear and Bright
	20	The Grain Rains
May	5	The Summer Begins
	21	The Grain Fills
June	6	The Grain in Ear
	21	The Summer Solstice
July	7	The Slight Heat
	23	The Great heat
August	7	The Autumn Begins
	23	The Limit of Heat
September	8	The White Dew
	23	The Autumnal Equinox
October	8	The Cold Dew
	23	The Hoar Frost Begins
November	7	The Winter Begins
	22	The Little Snow
December	7	The Heavy Snow
	21	The Winter Solstice
January	6	The Little Cold
	21	The Severe Cold

The festivals and holidays of the Chinese (and Japanese and Koreans) are marked off on this annual calendar. Generally a holiday is seen as being on a certain day of a particular month (the months being numbered 1–12). Thus, the Dragon Boat Festival is said to be celebrated on the fifth day the fifth lunar month. The fifth lunar month begins on June 6 (give or take two weeks) and hence the Dragon Boat Festival would be held near June 11. The main traditional Chinese festivals would include:

- Laba Festival, eighth day of the 12th month
- Preliminary Year festival, 23rd day of the 12th month
- Spring Festival (New Year's), first day of the first month
- Lantern Festival, 15th day of the first month
- Pure Brightness Festival, first day of the third month

Dragon Boat Festival, fifth day of the fifth month
 Double Seventh Festival, seventh day of the seventh month
 Ullam-bana (Ghost Festival), 15th day of the seventh month
 Mid-Autumn Festival, 15th day of the eighth month
 Double Ninth Festival, ninth day of the ninth month
 Winter Solstice

The Chinese calendar was in general use until 1911, when the Chinese adopted the Gregorian calendar for official use. The Japanese and Koreans had also adopted a version of the Chinese calendar, but Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1873 and Korea did so in 1895. In all three countries, festivals and holidays are still calculated using the old calendar.

Indian Calendars

According to Indian lore, our world goes through four stages of development—the Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga, and the present Kali Yuga. A medieval Indian astronomical treatise, the *Surya Siddhanta*, Kali Yuga began on what would be January 23, 3102 BCE in the Common Era calendar. The *Surya Siddhanta* became the work from which all Hindu and Buddhist calendars began and from which they diverged. Most of the countries that came and went in what is now India developed a variation of this calendar. It faced competition from the Muslim lunar calendar after 1200, but then in 1757, the British introduced the Gregorian calendar, which remained in effect for official business until Indian independence in 1947.

The new Indian government, finding itself beset by a number of local calendars that had survived both the era of Muslim rule and British colonialism, developed a program of calendar reform. This led to the production of a modern solar calendar that in many ways followed the Gregorian calendar, but differed at significant points. It took as its starting point the vernal (spring) equinox of 78 CE, a date of importance in the life of the Satavahana dynasty, which ruled much of India from around approximately 230 BCE to around 220 CE, about 450 years. In 78 CE, the Satavahana ruler is believed to have initiated a new era marking his victory over Vikramaditya, the ruler of a neighboring kingdom, Ujjayini. The new era came to be known as Shalivahana Saka. The calendar finally introduced in India in 1957 became known as the Saka calendar.

The Saka calendar has 12 months, all of 30 or 31 days in length. There is a provision of adding a leap year day as needed. The calendar begins with a New Year's Day on the vernal (spring) equinox, March 21 or 22 on the Common Era calendar. It is the official calendar for all government business in India, and official Indian holidays such as Independence Day and Mahatma Gandhi's birthday are fixed on the Saka calendar. News media will often operate on both the Saka calendar and the Common Era calendar. Its 12 months are: (1) Chaitra, (2) Vaishakh. (3) Jyaishta, (4) Ashadha, (5) Shravana, (6) Bhadrapad, (7) Ashwin, (8) Kartika, (9) Margashirsha (10) Pausha, (11) Magha, and (12) Phalguna.

The calendar reform committee also introduced a new religious calendar by which Hindu festival days could be calculated in a way both related to and separate from the new secular Saka calendar. The religious calendar includes twelve 30-day lunar months (which possess the same names as the solar-based Saka calendar). The month is named for the solar month in which the new moon occurs. Should two new moons occur in the same solar month, it is time to add a month, and the name of the previous month is repeated. Previously, lunar months were reckoned from new moon to new moon in southern India and from full moon to full moon elsewhere. In the reformed calendar, lunar months are measured from new moon to new moon. Days also begin at sunrise rather than midnight.

The primary religious festivals in India are Ramanavami, Buddha Purnima (Buddha’s birthday or Wesak), Janmashtami, Dussera, Diwali (Festival of Lights), Guru Nanak’s birthday, Mahashivaratri, Navaratri; and Holi (Festival of Colors). These festivals remain movable events on the reformed religious calendar, but the amount of movement has been somewhat limited.

The Nanakshahi Calendar of the Sikhs

For centuries, the Sikh community used the Hindu lunar calendar of northern India to set its holidays. In the 1960s, however, Pal Singh Purewal, a Canadian Sikh, suggested that Sikhs have their own calendar and that it be a symbol of their independence from the Hindu community. He set about creating the calendar, which in the 1990s was finally adopted by the ruling authorities in the community in the Punjab. His calendar was based on the sidereal year, slightly different from the tropical year upon which the Common Era calendar rests, and was slightly altered by a committee appointed to deal with the problem. Since 1999, however, it has been used to determine the dates of the major Sikh commemorations and holidays.

The Nanakshahi calendar is named for the founder of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak (1469–1539). It is a solar calendar based on Nanak’s birth year (1469) and used March 14 as its first day of the first month, or New Year’s Day. There are 12 months:

Chet	March 14
Vaisakh	April 14
Jeth 1	May 5
Harh	June 15
Sawan	July 16
Bhadon	August 16
Asu 1	September 5
Katik 1	October 5
Maghar	November 14
Poh	December 14
Magh	January 13
Phagan	February 12

While most Sikh holidays are now set by the Nanakshahi calendar, there are three holidays that Sikhs celebrate that remain linked to celebrations in the larger Hindu

community. These three continue to be set annually according to the Hindu lunar calendar—*Hola Mohalla* (tied to the Hindu holiday called *Holi*), *Bandi Chhor Divas* (which coincides with the Hindu Festival called *Diwali*), and *Guru Nanak's Birthday*, a national holiday in India.

Bahá'í Calendar

The Bahá'í Faith has emerged out of the movement begun by Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz, Iran. In 1844, he proclaimed that he was "the Báb" (a.k.a. "the Gate"). The movement he began, called Bábism, was suppressed by Persian authorities, in the midst of which the Báb was imprisoned and executed (1850). The Báb suggested that followers should look for "He whom God shall make manifest." One of the Bab's followers, Bahá'u'lláh, claimed to be that person in 1863. His declaration led to the founding of the Bahá'í Faith.

The calendar of the Bahá'í Faith, called the Badi' calendar, originated with the Báb, who devised a calendar of nineteen 19-day months. Bahá'u'lláh subsequently revised it. He set the beginning of the year at the spring (or vernal) equinox, added the intercalary days, and generally tied it to the Gregorian or Common Era calendar. Shoghi Effendi, who led the Bahá'í movement in the mid-20th century, fixed the alignment with the Common Era calendar by setting the first day of the year on the Bahá'í calendar as always March 21 (even when the spring equinox is March 20 or 22).

As currently used, the Badi' calendar uses 1844, the year of the Báb's original proclamation, as the base year from which time is measured. The year consists of nineteen 19-day months with four days (five in leap years) added beginning on February 26 to keep it aligned to the Common Era calendar. The number 19

The months of the Bahá'í calendar are:

Bahá (Splendour)	March 21–April 8
Jalál (Glory)	April 9–April 27
Jamál (Beauty)	April 28–May 16
'Aamat (Grandeur)	May 17–June 4
Núr (Light)	June 5–June 23
Ramat (Mercy)	June 24–July 12
Kalimát (Words)	July 13–July 31
Kamál (Perfection)	August 1–August 19
Asmá' (Names)	August 20–September 7
'Izzat (Might)	September 8–September 26
Mashíyyat (Will)	September 27–October 15
'Ilm (Knowledge)	October 16–November 3
Qudrat (Power)	November 4–November 22
Qawl (Speech)	November 23–December 11
Masá'il (Questions)	December 12–December 30
Sharaf (Honour)	December 31–January 18
Sulán (Sovereignty)	January 19–February 6
Mulk (Dominion)	February 7–February 25
Ayyám-i-Há (The Days of Há)	February 26–March 1 (Intercalary Days)
'Alá' (Loftiness)	March 2–March 20 (Month of fasting)

has a variety of meanings in the Bahá'í Faith, and the calendar gives visible expression to them. Each of the months is named for an attribute of God.

On the first day of each month, Bahá'ís will gather for a feast. The last month is a month of fasting analogous to the Muslim's Ramadan. The calendar is strictly a religious calendar and is used only to mark the events of the Bahá'ís' remembrance of the founding events of their faith and the annual holy days they observe. Otherwise, Bahá'ís use the Common Era calendar or the calendar used by the dominant group in the country in which they reside. Bahá'ís are present in more than 200 countries worldwide.

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See also Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Buddhism—Cycle of Holidays; Chinese Religion—Annual Cycle of Festivals; Common Era Calendar; Diwali; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical Year; Hajj; Hinduism—Festivals and Holidays; Holi; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Judaism—Festivals of the Year; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Mayan Calendar; Nanak's Birthday, Guru; Pesach; Ramadan; Rosh Hashanah; Shavuot; Shinto—Cycle of Holidays; Sukkot; Wesak/Vesak; Wicca/Neo-Paganism Liturgical Calendar; Yom Kippur; Zoroastrianism.

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Candlemas. See Bridget, Saint's Day of St.; Imbolc; Presentation of Jesus, in the Temple, Feast of the

Cannabis Day (July 1)

Cannabis Day is a holiday of the Assembly of the Church of the Universe, one of a number of small religious groups founded since the 1960s that espouse the use of various controlled substances, in this case marijuana, and a religious sacrament. It was founded in 1969 by Walter Tucker, then a resident of Ontario, Canada. The church also advocates nudity as a symbol and demonstration of human equality.

The church finds its justification for using marijuana in the large number of contemporary reports of people that the alteration of consciousness from its consumption has offered access to heretofore-inaccessible spiritual realms, and anthropological records and stories from a variety of religious traditions (especially that of ancient Sumer) indicating that its use was widespread in ancient cultures and actually underlies many of the treasured insights of the world's religions. The widespread availability of marijuana (or Cannabis) has allowed the church to continue in spite of the questionable legal status of its primary sacrament.

The church celebrates some of the more widespread celebrative occasions such as the summer and winter solstice, but its main holiday annually is Cannabis Day. This day introduces a month of celebration of the church's primary foci—and church members are invited to observe the celebration according to their own individual choice. It is a time for the re-creation of the ideal situation of the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve were nude and partook of the Tree of Life, believed to be marijuana (Genesis 2:9, 25). Thus members may and are encouraged to consume cannabis, use the many additional products derived from the hemp plant, and participate in clothes-optional gatherings.

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See also Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice.

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Carnival. See Mardi Gras

Casimir, Saint's Day of St. (March 4)

The future saint Casimir (1458–1483) was born into the royal family that ruled Poland and Lithuania. Unusual for young boys in noble families, as a teenager, Casimir lived a highly disciplined and religious life. He was known to spend his nights in prayer and early on decided to live as a celibate.

When nobles in Hungary became dissatisfied with their king, they prevailed upon Casimir's father, the king of Poland, to send his son, then but 13 years of age, to assume the throne. Casimir eagerly accepted his father's direction in this matter, as he saw himself defending Christianity against the invading Muslim Turks. Unfortunately, he was not given the resources to accomplish the task, and his outnumbered army was defeated the first time it was tested. Casimir followed the advice of his generals and returned home.

He picked up his life of prayer and continued his studies. King Casimir IV spent the time between 1479 and 1484 in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, and left his son as the vice-regent in Poland. His father tried to arrange a marriage for him, but young Casimir preferred the single life.

Casimir had also been fasting, and as a result developed lung problems. He undertook a trip to Lithuania in 1484, but died on the way. He was buried at Vilnius, his remains now being in what is called Saint Casimir's Chapel in the cathedral. He was canonized by Pope Adrian VI (r. 1522–1523) in 1522. He has been named a patron saint of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia.

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See also Stanislaus, Saint's Day of St.

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Catherine of Siena, Saint's Day of St. (April 29)

Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) was a saintly and influential woman who lived in quite turbulent times. She was born the 23rd child in a large family. An overtly religious child, she reached a crisis moment when pushed to pay more attention to her appearance as she reached a marriageable age. She defied her mother by cutting off her hair. Her father, however, supported her and gave her a private room to continue her prayer life.

When she reached 18 years of age, she joined the Dominican Third Order and began three years in seclusion, prayer, and austerity. She attracted a following and began to write open letters offering spiritual guidance. As these letters began to take note of more secular public issues, controversy swelled. She was attached to the point that the Dominicans were forced to hold a hearing on her work. They ended up clearing her of any charges. Meanwhile, she took up the cause of the ongoing crusade in the Holy Land and worked for a resolution of issues between the pope and the city of Florence.

In June 1376, Catherine went to the papal residence at Avignon as an ambassador of peace representing Florence. She was unsuccessful on her peace mission, but was more successful in convincing Pope Gregory XI (r. 1370–1378) to return to Rome. He left Avignon in January 1377. Following Gregory's death in 1378, Catherine was severely tested by the schism that followed. The popes had been living at Avignon, in southern France, for more than 70 years. The Roman populace demanded that the next pope be Italian and remain in Rome. In response, Urban VI (r. 1378–1389) was elected, but three months later, a rival pope appeared who settled in again at Avignon. Catherine devoted much of the last two years of her life to advocating the case for Urban VI and pleading for the unity of the Church.

In spite of the eventful life she led, Catherine is remembered today more for her saintly life and her writings on mysticism and spirituality. When she died at the relatively youthful age of 33 following a period of fasting, she was buried at Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, close to the Pantheon. Some of her remains are now at the Basilica of San Domenico, in Siena, where she lived much of her life. She was canonized in 1461, though her feast day was not immediately included in the church's liturgical calendar. It was added in 1597 and placed on April 29, the day of her death. It was moved to April 30 in 1628 so as not to conflict with the saint's day for Saint Peter of Verona. It was returned to April 29 in the revisions of the calendar in 1969. By that time, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) had named her a patron saint of Italy (1940) along with Saint Francis of Assisi. More importantly, in 1970, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) gave her the title of Doctor of the Church, making her, along with Saint Teresa of Ávila, the first women so acknowledged. In 1999, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) named her one of the patron saints of Europe.

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See also Dominic, Saint's Day of St.; Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint's Day of St.

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Celebrity Center International (First Week of August)

Among the unique features of the Church of Scientology has been the focus upon artists and the arts. Church members reference L. Ron Hubbard's own artistic accomplishments, especially the music he wrote. They prize the creativity of artists as symbolic of the potentials of the human spirit (the Thetan) as it is freed to realize its full potential. Based upon its very positive appraisal of the artistic community, the church has attempted to reach out to artists and provide a haven for them to pursue their own spiritual development. Often hindering artists is their celebrity status, which often presents obstacles to their becoming a member in a religious community.

To provide a haven for artists and others, the church has opened a set of what are termed Celebrity Centers at which public people may pursue their own spiritual goals outside the spotlight that generally follows them. The first local church was in Los Angeles, and it was there, in Hollywood, that in 1969 the first Celebrity Center was

opened. Subsequently, additional centers have been opened in urban complexes across North America and Europe. The Hollywood Celebrity Center has attracted numerous people in the movie industry on both sides of the camera, though it has been most known as the church for a number of international stars of television and the cinema.

The Hollywood Celebrity Center opened in 1969, and that event is celebrated the first week of August each year. The gala is an evening event at the center, highlighted by a large banquet and party.

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See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.



The Church of Scientology Celebrity Center is located in Hollywood, California. The center is a place for public figures to get away from the spotlight for spiritual practice. (AP/Wide World Photos)

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Chair of St. Peter, Feast of the (February 22)

It is the belief of the Roman Catholic Church that the Apostle Peter came to Rome where he founded the Christian movement, taught the believers for a number of years, and eventually met a martyr's death. The basilica of Saint Peter's is built over what is believed to be his tomb. It is also their belief that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and that the present pope continued that office. Among the many relics that are housed at Saint Peter's is a chair believed by some to have been the apostle's and from which he set to offer teachings to the church in Rome. That chair is now located in the apse at the end of the central nave in the church, in the midst of a monumental setting created by Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The chair is actually a rather recent piece, having been the gift to the pope from Charles the Bald, briefly the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (r. 875–877).

Prior to Charles the Bald's gift, there were two other chairs that for several centuries had been hailed as the chair upon which Peter sat to do his teaching work. One of these chairs was kept at the old Saint Peter's (which preceded the present basilica) and the other at one of the Roman catacombs. These two chairs were honored with feast days on January 25 and February 22, respectively. Those two days became a moment to stop and pay honor to the office of the pope, as bishop of Rome, and the days increased in importance as the office of the pope attained higher levels of authority. A ninth-century martyrology, the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, discussed the January 18 feast day with Peter's stay in Rome and the February 22 date with his stay at Antioch (Syria). Both days were, however, perpetuated, and different elements in the church celebrated one or the other.

In 1604, Pope Clement VIII (r. 1592–1605) raised the two feast days to the highest level of celebrations on the Roman Catholic calendar. They remained there until 1960, when Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963), as part of an effort to remove duplicated feasts from the general Roman calendar, abandoned the January 18 feast of the Chair of Peter. At the same time, he lowered the status of the remaining feast.

Prior to its removal from the Roman calendar, in 1908, the January 18 date had been chosen by Fr. Paul James Wattson, a convert from the Episcopal Church, as the day to begin an eight-day period (called an octave) of special prayers for Christian unity. That effort evolved into the present Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, now annually celebrated by a wide spectrum of Christians from January 18 to 25.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

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Chaitayna's Birthday. See Gaura Purnima

Chaitra Purnima

Chaitra Purnima (the full moon day in the Indian month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar) is dedicated to Chitragupta, a Hindu deity who in Hindu mythology is the deputy of Lord Yama, the lord of death. As such, his task is the keeping of the records of human beings, somewhat like Saint Peter in the Christian tradition, and upon their death, to present his accounting to Yama, who subsequently assigns each individual to a heavenly or hellish afterlife. Offering pujas to Chitragupta is seen as earning merit relative to the afterlife.

Among the famous sites for the celebration of Chaitra Purnima is the Chitragupta temple in Kancheepuram, notable as the only separate temple built and devoted to Chitragupta. There is a story concerning this temple that begins with the deity Brihaspati, known as the guru of the gods, and in particular of Indra. At one point, the two deities disagreed, and Brihaspati withdrew his guidance from Indra. Indra subsequently committed a variety of evils. Later, when their relationship was reestablished, Brihaspati directed Indra to make a pilgrimage to atone for his sins. In the midst of his journey, Indra felt the burden of his evil taken from him, and at that spot, he discovered a Shiva lingam (a symbol of the deity Shiva), and responded by having a temple constructed at that spot. When the temple was completed, he worshipped Shiva and golden lotuses appeared in a nearby pool. That day was Chaitra Purnima.

Chaitra Purnima is also the same day as the birthday of Lord Hanuman, the popular monkey-faced deity, and is thus celebrated through much of India (especially in the north) and throughout the Indian diaspora.

Vaishakh Snan, the month of performing ritual baths in sacred rivers and other designated pools of water, begins on Chaitra Purnima and lasts until the next full moon.

Chaitra Purnima is especially celebrated in Orissa and Bihar where it is the most important festival of many of the tribal people who are Hindus. Here, there is a focus on the goddess Mangala, to whom a famous temple in Puri is dedicated. The day is considered auspicious for fishermen, who will offer special pujas for success at their endeavor. In Orissa, Chaitra Purnima initiates a whole month of festivities celebrated by the wearing of new clothes and parties late into the evenings. Men will engage in hunting and distribute their kills to their village.

Constance A. Jones

See also Hanuman Jayanti; Narak Chaturdashi.

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Chandan Yatra

Among the most famous of Hindu festivals is the Ratha Yatra, which features the movement of the deities of the Jagannath temple out in the streets aboard three large chariots (*rathas*). Ratha Yatra falls on the second day of the waxing moon in the Hindu month of Ashodha (i.e., late June or early July on the Common Era calendar).

Chandan Yatra, or the Sandalwood Festival, begins 42 days prior to the Ratha Yatra. On this day, devotees begin construction of the rathas for the great festival. The name Chandan Yatra indicates a period of worshiping the deities with water mixed with the very aromatic sandalwood.

Chandan Yatra is divided into two periods. The first, known as Bahar chandan (or outer chandan) last for three weeks beginning on third day of the waxing Moon of the month of Vaisakha (late April–early May). It is then succeeded by Bhitari chandan (or the inner chandan) which begins in the month of Jyaishta.

Each day for the 21 days of the outer chandan, the images of the deities—Rama, Krishna, Madan Mohan, Lakshmi, and Saraswati—are taken in a procession to the Narendra tank, a large, square, manmade lake about three-quarters of a mile from the Jagannath temple. The five shivas known as Pancha Pandavas—Lokanath, Yameswar, Markandaya, Kapal Mochan, and Nilakantha—accompany Madan Mohan (who represents Lord Jagannath). When the entourage arrives, Madan Mohan, Lakshmi, and Saraswati are placed in one gorgeously decorated boat, and Rama, Krishna, and the Pancha Pandavas are placed in a second. As they sail around the lake, they received various modes of worship with accompanying music and dance. In the center of the tank, there is an island with a small temple. The island is connected with the shore by a bridge, and Madan Mohan is taken to the island as the other deities float on the lake. On the 21st day, a special ritual is performed.

The procession to the tank is led by a traditionally decorated royal elephant followed by two large elaborately decorated platforms upon which the deities rest. Large crowds will gather along the procession route to catch a glimpse of and make offerings to the deities. Others will use the occasion to take a dip in the tank.

After 21 days of processions, the activity shifts to the inside of the Jagannath temple. On each day for the next 21 days, various rites are performed, to which the public is not invited. Chandan Yatra concludes on the first day of the waxing moon in the month of Ashodha and is, of course, immediately followed by the Ratha Yatra.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ratha Yatra.

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Chaturmas Vrat

Chaturmas Vrat is observed for a period of four months within the Hindu community (and especially the Vaishnava Hindus) of India that begins officially on Deva Sayana Ekadashi, the 11th day of the waxing moon during the Indian Hindu month of Ashadh. It will end on the 11th day (ekadashi) of the waning moon in the month of Kartika. Chaturmas Vrat roughly corresponds to the monsoon or rainy season in India, from July to October. In centuries past, travel was difficult during this time, and the wandering ascetics (those who had taken the sannyasin vows of the renounced life) would cease from their travels and remain in one place.

During Chaturmas, the Hindu deities are seen as being at rest, and can become enraged if disturbed. Thus, people will avoid engaging in important activities that will restructure one’s personal life—changing residences, weddings, building a temple—any activity upon which one would hope for a deity’s blessing.

Vaishnavas see Chaturmas as the time that Vishnu is in deep meditation upon the serpent Adishesha. Vishnu devotees see this as a time for fasting, for charitable activities toward the poor, and the cleaning and maintaining of temples. Many will reread the Hindu holy books such as the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*. One major Vaishnava festival, Janmashtami (Krishna’s birthday), occurs in the midst of Chaturmas.

Saivites also observe Chaturmas, especially during the month of Shravana (July–August). The Mondays during the month are considered highly auspicious. The story of the churning of the ocean milk, one of the most popular in Hinduism, is retold by Saivites at this time. The story begins with the *devas*, or demigods, complaining of weakness from a curse that had been placed on them. The deity Brahma told them that they needed to drink some *amrit*, the nectar of immortality, which could be obtained by the churning of the ocean. The *devas* were assisted by the *asuras* (demons) in the churning activity, which was so successful that the turbulent ocean threatened to become a destructive force, and Vishnu was forced to take action to calm it.

Due to the churning of the ocean by the *asuras* and *devas*, a pot of poison called Halahala was produced. This poison was determined to be so toxic that it could destroy all of creation. The *devas* thus approached the god Shiva, and out of his compassion, he drank the poison. Alarmed at his action, Shiva’s wife Parvati put her hands on his throat and prevented the poison from moving downward into

his body. The poison was, however, strong enough to change the color of Shiva's neck to blue. These events are said to have occurred during the month of Shravana. During the next month (Bhadrapad), Shavites in Maharashtra celebrate Ganesh Chaturthai, in honor of Shiva's son.

Many otherwise non-vegetarians will restrict themselves to a vegetarian diet during the four months of Chaturmas, while others will adopt less austere fasting patterns. They might avoid cooking oil, or salty/sweet preparations, or garlic or onion.

In October, the deities rise from their rest, and normal routines can be resumed. Diwali occurs near the end of Chaturmas. The rainy season also affected the emerging Jain and Buddhist communities and their monastic core, and both adopted an annual routine that incorporated Chaturmas in some form, though they dropped the Hindu stories of the gods.

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See also Diwali; Ganesh Chaturthi; Janmashtami; Kamada Ekadashi; Mokshada Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi; Vassa.

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Che Kung, Birthday of

Che Kung, like many of the traditional Chinese Taoist deities, was originally a human, in this case a warrior who lived during the Song dynasty (920–1279). He is revered, however, not for his martial skills so much as his healing abilities. He is known as a god with a special affinity for medicine, and hence one to which a person can turn in time of illness. He is also a deity known to change the luck of gamblers who have fallen on bad times. His main temple in Hong Kong has been located at Sha Tin, a town in the New Territories.

Che Kung's Birthday is just the second day after the Chinese New Year, and many flock to his temple as part of the overall festive New Year's celebration, which always continues for several days. The many fortune-tellers attached to the temple are known to turn large wheels of fortune to ensure good luck for their clients during the coming year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Tam Kung Festival.

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Cherry Blossom Festival. See Sakura Matsuri

Chichibu Yomatsuri

The small town of Chichibu, located about an hour from Tokyo adjacent to Mount Bukozan and its 2,000-year-old Shinto shrine, hosts one of Japan's more spectacular annual celebrations. The events around the festival begin about a week ahead of the actual festival, which occurs on December 2 and 3, and with the climatic event being the giant parade the evening of December 3. This parade features six floats, each some 30 feet high and weighing more than 10 tons, processing through the streets to the sound of music and drums.

The Chichibu Shrine enshrines three main Shinto kami (deities)—Yagokoro-omoikane-no-mikoto, Chichibuhiko-no-mikoto, and Ame-no-minaka-nushi-no-kami—plus additional deity figures, including Myoken, a female kami and personification of the North Pole star, and the late Prince Chichibu (1902–1953), the second son of Emperor Taishō (r. 1912–1926) and a younger brother of Hirohito, the emperor Shōwa (r. 1926–1989). Each of the floats in the parade contains a portable shrine of one of the shrine's deities.

During the years of the Kamakura Shogunate (1185–1333), the Chichibun Shrine merged with a local Buddhist temple, and they operated under the name Myoken-gū. It was at this time that Myoken, a Japanese Buddhist bodhisattva, attained a placement among the enshrined kami. The Meiji government that came to power in 1868 forced the separation of such merged temples, but Myoken retained a position at the shrine.

The parade begins around 7:00 p.m. with all six of the floats in front of the shrine. There is a brief ceremony, and then the parade begins to *otabisho* (temporary resting spot), which is attained only after climbing a somewhat steep hill named Dangozaka. Here a ritual presentation of a stone tortoise (modeled after the one Myoken is said to ride) occurs.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aizen Summer Festival; Aki Matsuri; Koshogatsu; Nagasaki Kunchi; Natsu Matsuri; Onbashira; Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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Children's Day

Children's Day is a major holy day of the Unification Church, a unique new religion founded in 1954 in Korea by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920). Moon was married for a second time in 1960, and Children's Day was established on October 1 of that year. It is a different day each year as its celebration is set by the tradition Korean lunar calendar. Children's Day was the second holy day to be established, following Parents Day.

Both Children's Day and Parents Day illustrate the centrality of family to Unification Church theology. Sun Myung Moon claims that his sinless life, path of obedience to God, and completion of the mission of Jesus has brought restoration to fallen humanity. Moon is the True Father, his wife Hak Ja Han (b. 1943) is the True Mother, and together they are True Parents. According to Unification teaching, children from their marriage are viewed as True Children, born allegedly without original sin. On this basis, other humans can be grafted to the True Family.

In a 1983 Children's Day message, Sun Myung Moon stated: "Today is Children's Day, but what kind of children are we talking about? We are talking about true children. Are you true children? True children must be born in the realm of God's love, grow up there and marry there, becoming perfected children of God. You have already been born and you are a reality on this earth; since you cannot ever go back and be physically born again, we must create a way to achieve the same goal." Moon claims that Unification members identify with his natural children in a process of spiritual twinning that brings them into the True Family.

The regeneration of fallen humanity by Sun Myung Moon ultimately involves the liberation of God. According to Moon, God has been searching for a perfect Adam who restores the first Adam and completes the mission of Jesus, the failed second Adam. Jesus was supposed to have married and restored the human family, but his own failings and those of his parents forced him to follow a secondary path to death on the cross. Moon claims that he has also brought full liberation to Jesus.

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See also Day of All Things; Parents Day; True Parents' Birthday; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Children's Day (Japan). See **Kodomo no Hi**

Chinese New Year's (Preliminary Festival)

The Chinese New Year, whose festivities are held the first week of the Chinese lunar calendar, is possibly the most celebrated event in the year both in China and among people of Chinese heritage worldwide. Much less well known, especially outside of the Chinese community, is the Preliminary Festival or Small New Year, held a week before in preparation of New Year's. This Preliminary Festival occurs on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month, usually around the end of January on the Common Era calendar.

The Preliminary Festival centered on one of the more famous Taoist deities, the Kitchen God. The Taoist pantheon is headed by the Jade Emperor, who annually dispatches the Kitchen God from heaven to keep an eye on the family and report back on the family's activities. Based upon the Kitchen God's report, the Jade Emperor will dispense good or evil to the members of the family in the coming year. The Kitchen God leaves the home to report to the Jade Emperor on the 23rd day of the 12th month. He is often pictured with a wife, and as many as seven children.

At the end of the 1950s, the government of the People's Republic attempted to stop the worship of the Kitchen God and actively suppressed it, but following the Cultural Revolution, it has slowly made a comeback. The god remained popular in Taiwan and within the diaspora communities.

Traditionally, the family has a porcelain statue or at least a picture of the Kitchen God in the room where food is prepared. On the appointed day, the kitchen is cleaned and the statue of the Kitchen God washed. The god will then be presented with an offering of water, grass, and sweets. The water and grass is for the horse the god rides, while the sweets (sugar syrup, sticky rice, honey, etc.) have a more sinister purpose—to make the god's teeth stick together so he is unable to utter anything negative about the family to the Jade Emperor. (Some suggest the sweets are to be thought of more as a bribe, or to make the god's mouth so sweet that he would not think of speaking negatively.) Then a picture of the Kitchen God is burned, a symbol of his journey upward. A new picture will be put up on New Year's Day, a week later, symbolic of his return from heaven.

The Kitchen God's name is Zao Jun (or Stove Master). Numerous stories are told of him, most involving accounts of his mortal life and an event that led to his becoming the Kitchen God. One such story tells of Zao Jun as a farmer. One year, when crops failed, he had to sell his wife to pay the bills. Even with that, he wound up as a servant in the home of his wife's new husband. The wife secretly baked some buns into which she had placed coins. Rather than eating the buns, he sold them. When he discovered what he had done, he killed himself. The gods took pity on him and gave him the job of Kitchen God. After his wife's death, he was later reunited with her.

As the Preliminary Festival approaches, family members will be on their best behavior, and regular veneration of the Kitchen God, usually in the form of burning incense, will occur. After his departure for heaven, the door way may be adorned with door gods to keep away evil spirits and influences. People will also write well

wishes on strips of red paper and post these on the entrance way to their home or business. The red color is both lucky and potent in frightening off Nian, the New Year monster, who can make an appearance to destroys crops and disturb homes.

Among the most substantive activities for the week of preparation is the settling of debts before the New Year begins. With the Kitchen God fully placated and sent off to heaven and all the preparations in place, however, the family is ready for the imminent big celebration, Chinese New Year's Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; New Year's Day.

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Chinese New Year's Day

Chinese New Year's is annually the most celebrated festival of the Chinese people. It begins on the first day of the Chinese lunar calendar, and follows a week of preparation. Celebrated usually in early February, it is a time of hope, welcoming the beginning of good weather with the spring season, and a better year than that left behind. A rich heritage of stories, art, and rituals has assembled itself around this holiday.

The celebration of the turning of the year, with offerings of thanks for the past year and invoking favorable events in the new, can be traced to the early years of the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE) in China. With the adopt of the *taichu* calendar during the Han dynasty (475–221 BCE), the first day of the year on the new calendar came to unify a variety of celebrations that had been held with similar purpose on a number of dates within the territory united under Han rule. The conflating of a variety of activities done to celebrate, worship, and sacrifice, the holiday grew in significance decade by decade. By the Tang dynasty, the exploding of fireworks, drinking wine, and staying up all night with lanterns became identified with the day. As the entertainment aspect developed, lion dancing, dragon dancing, storytelling drama, flowers, and music were all integrated into the festivities. The temple of the god of the city became one of the popular stops on a round of holiday activities.

With many local variations, rituals for the day included veneration with sacrifice to the deities, veneration of ancestors, visits with the extended family, and the writings of *chun lian* (poetic couplets with brief hopeful and uplifting



Chinese lion dancers perform in a New Year's parade. (Arievdwolde/Dreamstime.com)

messages). Activities may start a week before New Year's Day and continue for up to two weeks afterward, depending upon one's circumstance, including one's ability to take off work.

During the last weeks of the old year, homemakers begin spring cleaning and pay attention to the Kitchen God, who will, on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month, leave for his annual visit with and report to the Jade Emperor, the head of the Taoist pantheon. On that day, the Preliminary Festival for the New Year, the family will offer their veneration of the Kitchen God with grass and water for the horse on which he will travel and a sticky sweet (honey, sticky rice, etc.) so he will be unable to speak badly about the family. After he departs, the family will get serious about decorations and food for New Year's. The doors will be stuffed with red papers picturing door gods to keep out spirits that would bring bad luck, and all would begin to settle any outstanding debts.

Shortly before New Year's Day, people who now live away from their family home will return to it, most often leaving the city for a site of their rural upbringing. On New Year's Eve, they may stay up all night celebrating, reminiscing about the past year as they prepare to leave it behind, and wishing each other a good life in the new year approaching. They will have begun the evening making offerings to the deities at the home altar and to the family's honored ancestors and exchanging gifts. As the dawn approached, the paper seals on the doors are removed, and the house now opened to receive all the auspicious forces that might enter to influence the new year. Firecrackers will now be heard throughout the town, though the streets are deserted.

New Year's Day itself is for eating, visiting with friends and neighbors, and enjoying the wealth of entertainment that will be available through the day. The day is often punctuated with the acknowledgment of traditional culture, the temple ceremonies of traditional religion where the gods of the Taoist pantheon in all their local uniqueness will be acknowledged, usually by the burning of incense.

Flowers are an important part of the New Year's celebration, and the narcissus is the most favored. One story tells of a widow who had only a small plot of land to farm. In spite of her poverty, she showed kindness to a beggar, and gave him the last of her food. He saw her crying and discovered that she had nothing to feed her family for supper. The beggar then ran out of the house and across her land to a nearby pond. He jumped in and disappeared. As she searched for his body, flowers began to grow on her land. As they blossomed, people began to arrive to purchase the beautiful narcissi. From that time on, the widow was able to make a comfortable living, and the narcissus became the preferred flower for the New Year's celebrations.

New Year's festivities will certainly spill over into the next day or two, as people slowly return to the city and their jobs. However, celebrations and visits with family and friends will continue as long as possible. The holiday spirit will continue until the Lantern Festival begins two weeks later.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's (Preliminary Festival); Lantern Festival (China); New Year's Day.

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■ Chinese Religion

China is the oldest continuous civilization on earth (imagine if Greece and Rome had never fallen), and religion is at its heart. The very first Chinese dynasties, long thought of as legendary, are now being confirmed as historical. (Archaeology in China is in its infancy compared to Egypt, for example, and new finds are periodically putting the earliest dates of Chinese civilization further and further into the past.)

The concept of "China" itself began with the first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, who in 221 BCE conquered several smaller kingdoms to form a unified state.

The new empire was called Zhongguo, the Middle Kingdom, still the Chinese name for China, which conveys its geographic and cosmic centrality. It was also referred to as Tian Xia, Under Heaven, which shows, perhaps, that Chinese self-conception was fundamentally religious.

Visit any Chinese temple in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, or any Chinese community anywhere in the world. Observe the religious activities, the attitudes and organizational structures. The temple may be called Taoist or Buddhist, or be named after any of a plenitude of divinities. What you are witnessing is Chinese religion in action. Chinese religion is the religion of the Chinese people. It is different from both Taoism and Confucianism, although it incorporates elements of both and has influenced both.

China has seen virtually every major religion practiced in its borders. Indeed, the capital of China during the Tang dynasty (618–907) was at the time the largest city in the world, and quite possibly as religiously diverse as New York City is today. Zoroastrians, Nestorian Christians, Manicheans, different kinds of Muslims, and Buddhists all lived together in relative harmony under the authority of the emperor. Later, the Chinese were exposed to Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. But all these religions, with the exception of Buddhism, remained foreign, and did not become part of Chinese religion properly so called.

Chinese religion is not a specific religion in the Western sense, with an articulate doctrine and confession of faith. Rather, it is a worldview that encompasses the rhythm of agricultural cycles, the primacy of the family, and the idea of China itself. In Chinese discourse, the idea of religion is often placed under the larger category of traditional culture.

The Earliest Dynasties: Divination, Sacrifice, and Ancestor Worship

China's first three dynasties, the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou, in many ways laid the foundation for Chinese religion, practice, and worldview for the next two millennia. The Xia dynasty was the time of legendary culture heroes. Fu Xi first established the family unit and bred animals; Shen Nong invented agriculture; Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, created medicine. There is not yet any archeological evidence confirming the existence of the Xia.

There is evidence that the Shang dynasty was founded around 1600 BCE in the present-day Yellow River Valley provinces. The Shang dynasty was a theocracy based not on military might, but on religion and ritual. The ruler was a priest-king who had power to communicate with the high god Di. Like many other civilizations around the world, the Shang dynasty engaged in human and animal sacrifice, which was a form of transaction: Deities were offered goods in hopes of obtaining immediate or long-range benefits. Official sacrifices included meat, grain, and wine. Important people were buried with texts, food, jewels, and human figures. Today, sacrifices are part of all temple services and usually consist of fruit, foodstuffs, and incense.

Another hallmark of Chinese religion from prehistory until today is divination. Definite evidence from the late Shang show that rulers used scapulamancy, that is, reading cracks on bones or turtle shells to predict the future. When the Zhou overthrew the Shang, besides ending the practice of human sacrifice, the Zhou kings introduced a new form of divination. By randomly picking from a pile a number of stalks of the milfoil plant, the diviner would generate odd or even numbers, which when repeated several times, would turn into a series of broken or unbroken lines. A diagram of six lines made up a hexagram. The text that interpreted the meaning of the 64 possible hexagrams was called the *Yijing* (more commonly known in the West as the *I Ching*; the Book of Changes). This Zhou dynasty classic also marked a shift from seeing the forces believed to control divination anthropomorphically to seeing them as impersonal forces, and from assuming a relationship of interdependence with deities to questioning the nature of that relationship.

The *Yijing* is a moral and metaphysical text that links human action to cosmic cycles. It sees the universe as continuously changing and perpetually active. It has probably been the most-used book in China (perhaps even the world), consulted by emperors, fortune-tellers, and common folk alike. It was appropriated by Confucians, Taoists, and Buddhists, but predates all these traditions. In more modern times, the *Yijing* has become popular in the West as part of the counterculture. In China today, using the *Yijing* (but not studying it academically) is technically illegal, though prevalent. Mao Zedong himself is said to have used it to plot military strategy.

Related to divination and sacrifice is ancestor worship. Ancestors were asked about which sacrifice was appropriate, and they were also asked to predict the future. Gods were asked, too, but through the ancestors as intermediaries. Ancestor worship is the true bedrock of belief in China. Evidence of such devotion can be found in the burial practice of Neolithic times. The more archeological evidence has been uncovered, the more support has been found for the hypothesis that the ancestral cult is one of the few constants of Chinese civilization from earliest times to the present. Ancestor worship is a demonstration of the mutual dependency between the living and dead. The dead have more power than when alive, but need supplies and sacrifice; the living need protection.

There is no concept of the immortal soul in Chinese religion. So what, then, is worshipped in ancestor worship? Traditional Chinese religion holds that humans have several kinds of souls (or energies) that constellate together to form a human. The *po* souls are physical energies that disperse back to the earth. The *hun* souls are the mental energies, which can be stored in ancestral tablets and remain part of the family lineage.

Around 1050 BCE, the Zhou tribe conquered the Shang kingdom from the west and set up the Zhou dynasty. Their sacrificial rites were conducted by a young descendant of the royal family, who acted as a kind of medium, or shaman (the Chinese word is *wu*). Men or women could be possessed by spirits or deities, or

send their souls on journeys. In ritual settings, shamans could heal and could also consult with the ancestors. Emperors used them right up until their suppression in the 11th century. In fact, many Chinese religions have their origins in mediumistic revelations, from the Heavenly Master Taoists of the third century CE to the quasi-Christian Taiping Rebellion in the 19th century. Several spirit-writing cults active in Hong Kong today are equally based on revelations from shamanic figures.

The Early Confucian Tradition

The Warring States period (403–221 BCE) of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–221 BCE) was a time of social disorder and political disunity. The Zhou king had little real power; rival states jostled for power. The Warring States was also China's richest era in religious and philosophical doctrine. Counselors for hire went from court to court promoting their own political philosophy and denigrating their rivals. This era has traditionally been referred to as the Hundred Schools period (551–233 BCE). The schools included logicians, hedonists, advocates of universal love, and cynical statesmen. Sunzi, the military strategist who wrote *The Art of War*, dates from that period as well. The two religious-philosophical systems of this period that survive down to the modern day are those of the philosophical Taoists, as they are often referred to, and the Confucians.

The Confucian tradition has shaped the ethical and ritual norms of China for over two millennia. Its founder, Master K'ung (551–479) or Kongzi, better known by his latinized name Confucius, often serves as the emblem of Chinese religion and civilization. Confucius was a petty official in the state of Lu from an impoverished noble family. He became a teacher whose students wrote down his teachings. About 100 years after his death, Confucius's sayings were compiled into a book of 497 verses in 20 chapters known as the Lunyu, or in English, the *Analects*.

Confucius spoke of certain virtues that all humans can and should cultivate. These include *shu* (reciprocity), *chung* (loyalty), *li* (ritual propriety or decorum), *ren* (human-heartedness, humanity, or benevolence), and *xiao* (filial piety). To practice these virtues means to become a gentleman, the Confucian ideal. Being a gentleman is not a result of mere birth or social position; it is rather a matter of character. These virtues can be taught, thus the importance the Confucian tradition has always placed on pedagogy. The idea of virtue being a matter of character and education, not noble birth, was revolutionary at the time, and constitutes the biggest contribution Confucius made to world civilization.

Note, too, that all Confucian virtues are based on relationships and action. He advocated morality of and in human relationships. Wholly absent from Confucianism are such Western solitary virtues as innocence and purity. In Confucianism, and in the Chinese religious worldview in general, there is no distinction between secular and sacred. All life becomes a holy ritual, man a holy utensil. Unlike Christianity or Buddhism, the original teachings of Confucianism posit no inner life, and no special relationship between man and God.

The two most important Confucian thinkers after Confucius himself were Mengzi and Xunzi. Mengzi (latinized to Mencius, 372–289 BCE) believed in the natural human potential for goodness, most notably expressed in his story about how any human being would respond, seeing a baby fall into a well. The most natural, automatic response is to rescue the baby. Mencius taught the natural equality of all things and the immanence of a benevolent divine power referred to as heaven. He fleshed out and standardized many of the ideas of the *Analects*, and in many ways, he is more important than Confucius is.

Xunzi (or Sun-tzu; 310–220 BCE) was generally more pessimistic. He saw human nature as fundamentally evil. Only with education can man learn to restrain his impulses. He was also known for his rational agnosticism, denying any kind of active heavenly principle. From the Sung dynasty on, Xunzi was not as popular as Mencius.

Chinese Cosmology: Yin-Yang and the Five Agents

The Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) saw the rise of religious Taoism, as well as the arrival of Buddhism from India via Central Asia. The Han also saw the development of a synthetic cosmology, a grand philosophy for a grand empire, which influenced all aspects of Chinese life from then on, from philosophy to medicine to architecture.

The most important element incorporated into Han cosmology was the theory of yin and yang. Originally referring to the shady (yin) and sunny (yang) sides of a mountain, by the Zhou dynasty, yin and yang were the metaphysical building blocks, symbolizing a fundamental polarity that manifests in many ways: dark and light, passive and active, female and male, earth and heaven. Yin and yang are not moral qualities: they do not refer to good and evil. Nor should they be construed as opposites: yin and yang exist in dynamic tension with each other, each containing the essence of the other and each becoming the other.

The other consistently important metaphysical principle is the composition of the universe from the five agents (*wu xing*). These are water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. They are emphatically *not* the equivalent of the four elements of Greek cosmology—water, fire, earth, and air. The five agents are not essences, but phases that all things pass through. They were used to explain the succession of dynasties, the astronomical procession, and indeed, all processes of growth and change.

Buddhism in China

Buddhism was the first portable faith; it was not tied to any particular people or location. Thus, it became the first world religion. It arrived in China from India through the trade routes of Central Asia. The meeting between China and Buddhism was one of the great cultural encounters in world history. Both were changed significantly.

Buddhism first entered China in the first century CE. At first, it was regarded as a sect of Taoism (one Taoist scripture told of the legendary founder of Taoism,

Laozi [Lao Tzu] going to India and teaching the Buddha). Soon, however, a deeper understanding of Buddhism was developed, promoted by translations of the sutras, the holy texts of Buddhism, into Chinese.

The late Han dynasty, disintegrating and decadent, was ready for Buddhism. Still, there were huge differences to be overcome. The Chinese and Indian civilizations were opposite in many ways. Their languages, including grammar, alphabet, and use of metaphor, were completely different. Their worldviews were similarly opposed. Chinese philosophy posited the existence of the universe and left it at that. Religious debate in China centered on the definition of the good life and questions of family and society. Its cosmology was finite. Indian philosophy was more cosmic, inquiring into the origins of the world. It cared more about an afterlife and salvation.

Also, Chinese religion was and is nonpsychological, with little analysis of individual personality. Buddhism involves and has always involved a sophisticated psychological analysis. Monasticism, one of the foundations of Buddhism, included many extremely un-Chinese practices, such as cutting off hair and burning corpses. Worst of all, though, from the Chinese perspective, becoming a monk meant leaving one's family, renouncing one's name, and not bearing children. Buddhism justified monasticism by making the *sangha* (the community of monks) into a kind of family. Taoism adopted a quasi-Buddhist style of monasticism only in the 12th century (Quanzhen Taoism).

These differences were the source of Buddhism's appeal as well. Buddhism addressed questions of suffering, death, salvation, and the afterlife that Chinese religion had heretofore ignored. The monkhood promoted social equality; sources show that the monasteries were filled by people from all segments of society: from ethnic minorities, to officials, to farmers. For Chinese women, Buddhism provided (as it still does) a way out of patriarchal Chinese society.

Buddhist monasteries flourished or shut down depending on state policy and imperial whim. To cite one notable example: In 845, the emperor, looking for immortality from the Taoists, decided to persecute the Buddhists. Records show that a quarter of a million monks and nuns were returned to lay life (out of a population at the time of 60 million). Five thousand monasteries were demolished or converted to other purposes. Monastic Buddhism never recovered. More popular sects flourished, notably Ch'an, the meditation tradition, which in Japan is known as Zen Buddhism; and Pure Land Buddhism, the devotional school, which posits that anyone can be reborn in Paradise. These sects continue to exist in China.

Although the previous paragraphs have dealt with Mahayana Buddhism, China has known all three main branches of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism has had a presence in China, though it now only exists in Southwest China's Yunnan province, among ethnic minorities related to the Thai and Burmese. Vajrayana, or Tibetan, Buddhism is, of course, the religion of the Tibetan people, and has been the religion of choice of Mongols, Manchus, and even Han.

Literati and Neo-Confucianism as Religion

The continuity of Chinese religion is unthinkable without the Classics of the literati, a series of books that formed the basis of classical education from the Han dynasty until the early 20th century. This canon is somewhat analogous to the Bible, in that it was studied, memorized, and commented on by the elite of Chinese society.

The Five Classics (*Wu Jing*) consists of Zhou dynasty texts, all of which were said to be edited by Confucius. They include the Book of History, the Book of Changes, the Book of Songs, the Spring and Autumn Annals (another history), and the Book of Rites.

Neo-Confucianism was an attempt to revitalize Confucianism through increasing its focus on social reform and personal improvement. It developed during the Sung dynasty, after the Confucian tradition had for several hundred years been eclipsed by Buddhism and Taoism.

Neo-Confucians promoted the Four Books (*Se Shu*) to canonical status. These are the *Analects* of Confucius, the Book of Mencius, and two short chapters extracted from the Book of Rites, dealing with self-cultivation: the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean. These texts became the basis of the civil service exams for the next 700 years.

The Four Books were edited and commented on by the most important neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi; 1130–1200). His thought has been called the crowning achievement of the Sung, and his influence has been felt not only in China, but in Japan and Korea. Zhu Xi believed all phenomena were made up of principle or pattern (*li*) and material force (*qi*). He advocated self-cultivation through an external “investigation of things.” Wang Yangming (1472–1529) challenged Zhu Xi’s metaphysics and program of self-cultivation. Both agreed on moral principles, and the ideal of sagehood, but Wang held that the mind was the source all things (like the idealist school of Western philosophy) and therefore objected to Zhu Xi’s program of external study, which depended so much on books. Wang thought all universal principles were already present in everyone’s mind (and so could not be known only by those who could afford to study). Therefore, even ordinary people could self-cultivate while working in the fields, for example.

Another prominent Neo-Confucian philosopher came up with a systematic metaphysics (something the original Confucians were lacking) based on the *Yijing*. Everything was made up of yin and yang, but prior to that was the supreme ultimate, or *taiji*, represented visually by the famous diagram of swirls of light and dark forming a circle, each swirl with a dot of the opposite color. This represents the undifferentiated cosmos out of which all things arise. Erroneously known in the West as the “Tai Chi symbol,” it can be found on everything from surfboards to tattoos. Take *taiji*—the word and the concept—and add *chuan*, meaning fist, to get the name of the slow-moving martial art now taught all over the world, which is said to accelerate the embodiment of the powers of the cosmos within the human frame.

State Confucianism was overthrown in 1905, and the civil examinations emphasizing the four Confucian classics were abolished. Twentieth-century Chinese literati are often called “New Confucians.” Most of them left mainland China and went to Hong Kong and Taiwan, and often from there to the United States. New Confucians work toward advancing Confucianism as a Third Way for the development of modern Asian society, as an alternative to both Western market capitalism and communism. They also are bringing their ancient philosophy into the global sphere, and proving it can coexist with democracy, environmentalism, and feminism. New Confucians are mainly university professors, though they have been called upon to make policy in Asian countries, particularly Singapore. The most prominent is Tu Wei-Ming, a professor at Harvard University.

When comparative religion departments were created in the 1960s and 1970s, courses in Chinese religion were generally taught by Chinese professors from the philosophy departments, who were themselves products of either secular or Christian education and came from a Confucian literati tradition. Thus, the study of Chinese religion in North America for many years ignored Chinese religion—sometimes even proposing that “the Chinese don’t have a religion.” The Confucian bias was evident in the way Buddhism was minimized and Taoism ignored or reviled. Philosophy was studied at the expense of ritual. The fact is that, although from the time of Xunzi, Confucian literati sometimes criticized the “superstition and mysticism” of other Chinese religions, Confucians have traditionally been as religious as any other Chinese. They engaged in divination, sacrifice, and ancestor worship as much as anyone in China. Neo-Confucians even had prayers for rain. In fact, Neo-Confucianism shares many characteristics with Taoism and Buddhism. Neo-Confucians stress the importance of lineage; they dedicate temples to perform rites; they emphasize meditation traditions (in Neo-Confucianism, meditation is called “quiet sitting”).

Popular Religion

During the Sung dynasty, popular religion often referred to as Chinese folk religion evolved into a tradition in its own right, something recognizable today. A pantheon of personified deities and household gods was worshipped in a plethora of local shrines. Popular religion became, in effect, the religion of everyone except clergy and literati. But much mutual influence existed between these spheres. In the 16th century, an explicitly syncretistic religion evolved, combining Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The founder was known as the “Master-of-the-Three-in-One.” There are still temples in Southeast Asian Chinese communities dedicated to this three-in-one religion.

The most important aspect of popular religion is the festival year, based on the lunar calendar. The most important festival marks, of course, the New Year, preparation and celebration of which takes several weeks, incorporating many religious traditions and rituals. There are also three different festivals during the year involving visits to ancestral tombs. Today, of course, many holidays are

thoroughly secularized, involving no more than the consuming of special foods. Chinese funerals are huge events, complete with special clothes, various protocols for mourners based on degree of relatedness, continuing sacrifices (at domestic altars, gravesites, and clan ancestral halls) and eventually reburial.

Religion and Rebellion (Sectarianism)

Often overlooked in Western discourse about Chinese religion is the fact that it is quite often political and even revolutionary in nature. The Han dynasty saw the Taoist sects of the Heavenly Masters and the Yellow Turbans try to bring about an ideal theocracy on earth.

Millenarian movements increased during the 16th and 17th centuries. These movements, whether inspired by Taoism or Buddhism, often worshipped goddesses, notably the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu). Perhaps the most famous of such movement was actually Protestant-inspired: the Taiping rebellion. Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864) had visions inspired by a Christian tract given to him by a missionary. He saw himself as God’s younger son. Inspired by mediumistic trances, he raised an army and took over a good portion of China, burning temples wherever he went. He eventually set up a capital in Nanjing. In 1864, the imperial army, aided by foreign troops, put him down.

One of the most important of these “heterodox” groups is the White Lotus Society, which began during the Southern Sung dynasty (1127–1279) and has spawned numerous sects ever since. These sects expect the coming of Mi-lo-fo (in Pali, Maitreya), the Buddha of the future, and their leaders have often claimed to be Maitreya himself or, at the least, a ruler who will found a virtuous dynasty and thereby usher in a new age. These sects, of course, have always been persecuted by the government, which has driven them further underground, and often made them more popular.

These groups were known for their clinics, schools, and other social services as well as for their married leadership. The White Lotus groups helped overthrow the Mongols and institute the Ming dynasty in 1368. The first Ming emperor then instituted a strict law against heterodoxy. Still, White Lotus groups were active up to the 19th century in North China. Also, they were the inspiration for early 20th-century millenarian groups, which, though combining elements of many religious groups, are in essence Maitreyist (for example, Tian Tao).

Religion in the PRC Today

Freedom of religion is officially guaranteed by the constitution of China; however, the government has the power to define what religion is. The five officially recognized religions in China are “Protestantism,” “Catholicism,” Taoism, Buddhism, and Islam. (The first two are in quotations because the Protestant Church of China is not affiliated with any denomination, and the Catholic Church is not affiliated with the Vatican. Catholics who remain loyal to Rome are often persecuted.)

Religious groups in China, like all other organizations, from opera troupes to universities to oil refineries, are controlled by a centralized bureaucracy, overseen by the Communist Party. Every religious denomination has organizations at the local, provincial, and national levels made up of councils of believers who are both lay and clergy, overseen by nonbelievers (party members) responsible for instituting government regulations. Overseeing it all, also at all three levels, is the Bureau of Religious Affairs, made up of bureaucrats, academics, and social scientists specializing in religious studies.

Taoism and Buddhism are the two largest religions in China, but because neither is a membership religion, accurate population counts are difficult to make (in fact, by some counts, Islam is the largest religion in China). Buddhism seems to have a higher profile, perhaps because of its internationalism and growing popularity in the West. Even during the height of antireligious fervor during the Cultural Revolution (1965–1975), a few monasteries were kept open for show. Taoism is more parochial, with fewer international exchanges and contacts. Throughout the 20th century, it was more likely to be suppressed as a heterodox cult or as superstition.

Taoist and Buddhist monks must be over 18, unmarried, have parental approval, and have lived in a monastery for a two-year trial period. Some outside observers have claimed that Taoist and Buddhist monks today serve more as museum guards and ticket takers than as religious contemplatives. Unquestionably, China has developed monasteries as income-generating tourist attractions and outfitted previously inaccessible sacred mountains with cable cars, hotels, and karaoke bars.

Confucianism is not recognized as a religion in China but as a philosophy and method of pedagogy, although there are some ancestral temples that claim to enshrine the Kong family. After the 1949 revolution, Confucian ideals were attacked as examples of backward feudalism. Lately, Confucius has been on a rebound as a moral exemplar, advanced by the government as a model of rectitude and selflessness, as part of their “rebuild spiritual civilization” campaign, an antidote to the corruption and materialism rampant in Chinese society today. In Taiwan, Confucius is a national hero, and his birthday is celebrated as a holiday. Confucianism is much more of a religion among Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

An important current development in modern China is the rise of quasi-religious institutions. These are neither officially sanctioned religions, nor proscribed “evil cults” (such as Falun Gong, the Home Church, and the like). They include private charities, temple and lineage associations, nongovernmental organizations, and foreign businesses that surreptitiously promote religion (e.g., Taiwanese-owned factories that include temples on their grounds at which workers are coerced to worship). Most qigong groups also fall in this quasi-religious category (as did Falun Gong before it was proscribed in 1999). So, too, do village or lineage festivals, which are officially called cultural or community events in order to maintain a legal status, although they may have very religious elements.

The most important quasi-religious movement in the PRC during the last half of the twentieth century could be said to be Maoism. Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976) founded the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Especially during the years of the Cultural Revolution, religious energies and activities were channeled into the Mao cult. Quotations from Chairman Mao, making up the famous “little red book,” were memorized and recited in groups. Families would bow daily to a poster of Mao. The chairman wanted to be cremated, but after he died, his body was put on display in the middle of Tiananmen Square in Beijing. More recently, he has become a domestic folk god, like Saint Christopher, his image adorning medallions hanging from rearview mirrors. The power of religion should never be underestimated in *Zhongguo Tian Xia*, the Middle Kingdom under Heaven.

Elijah Siegler

See also Buddhism—Cycle of Holidays; Che Kung, Birthday of; Chinese New Year’s (Preliminary Festival); Chinese New Year’s Day; Confucius, Anniversary of the Death of; Confucius’ Birthday; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Dragon Boat Festival; Guan Yin’s Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Laba Festival; Lantern Festival (China); Mazu Festival, Goddess; Mid-Autumn Festival; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Pak Tai, Birthday of; Pure Brightness Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the; Ullam-bana.

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Chinese Religion—Annual Cycle of Festivals

Chinese religion presents two notable annual cycles of festivities. The more notable and widespread is that of the annual set of festivities that begin with the Chinese New Year and follow the agricultural cycle. A second set, more regional and local, consists of the many festivals that honor a particular deity, usually on the designated birthday of that deity. With important distinctions, this latter cycle resembles the annual celebrations of saints in the several liturgical Christian traditions. Both cycles continue to follow the Chinese lunar/solar calendar.

Possibly the oldest calendar still in use, the Chinese calendar traces its beginning point of measuring time to what on the Common Era calendar is 2953 BCE. Over the centuries, the Chinese observed the heavens, built a sophisticated approach to astrology, and developed a complicated system for measuring time. The larger unit of time worked with the 12 signs of the zodiac repeated five times to make periods of 60 years, and the religious community responded by designating a deity of the year for each of the 60 years.

A new year on the 60-year cycle began on the new moon nearest to the 15th degree of the astrological sign (in the West) of Aquarius, which fall within two weeks of February 5 on the Common Era calendar. The year is subsequently divided into 12 lunar months. Each month is further divided into two two-week periods, making 24 periods (each of which mark a move of 15 degrees around the zodiac). The beginning of the year might move two weeks in either direction, but during a year in which the New Year occurred on February 5, the 24 periods would be:

February	5	Spring Begins
	19	The Rain Water
March	5	The Excited Insects
	20	The Vernal Equinox
April	5	The Clear and Bright
	20	The Grain Rains
May	5	The Summer Begins
	21	The Grain Fills
June	6	The Grain in Ear
	21	The Summer Solstice

July	7	The Slight Heat
	23	The Great heat
August	7	The Autumn Begins
	23	The Limit of Heat
September	8	The White Dew
	23	The Autumnal Equinox
October	8	The Cold Dew
	23	The Hoar Frost Begins
November	7	The Winter Begins
	22	The Little Snow
December	7	The Heavy Snow
	21	The Winter Solstice
January	6	The Little Cold
	21	The Severe Cold

Chinese festivals are marked off on this annual calendar. Any particular festival will be designated as occurring on a certain (numbered) day of a particular (numbered) month. The months are numbered from the 1st through the 12th. Thus, the Dragon Boat Festival is said to be held on the fifth day the fifth lunar month. The fifth lunar month begins on June 6 (give or take two weeks) and hence the Dragon Boat Festival would be held near June 11. The primary traditional Chinese festivals would include:

Laba Festival, eighth day of the 12th month

Preliminary New Year's Festival, 23rd day of the 12th month

Spring Festival (Chinese New Year's), first day of the first month

Lantern Festival, 15th day of the first month

Pure Brightness Festival (Tomb Sweeping Day), first day of the third month

Dragon Boat Festival, fifth day of the fifth month

Double Seventh Festival, seventh day of the seventh month

Ullam-bana (Ghost festival), 15th day of the seventh month

Mid-Autumn Festival, 15th day of the eighth month

Double Ninth Festival, ninth day of the ninth month

Winter Solstice

These are merely the primary days; there are others. It should also be noted that the beginning of the Chinese year is best understood with the preparation to the New Year's celebration that occurs during the 12th month when cleaning is done and attention paid to the kitchen deity who was seen to report to the Jade Emperor at the end of each year on the worthiness of the family members relative to their fortune in the coming year.

The second cycle of the year of festivities is built around the expansive pantheon of Chinese deities. Visiting a traditional Chinese temple will reveal a host of images of different gods, some of which are widely popular and will be found

in temples across China, none more so than the ubiquitous Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy (a deity shared with Buddhists). Other members of the hierarchy who will be seen are the Jade Emperor and the Monkey King. The list of deities has grown over the years as local heroes have been deified and veneration instituted locally. A number of deities remain purely local and are worshipped only within a few miles of the place of their heroic exploits.

In between the purely local deities, many of whom serve as city gods, are a host of deities who have become regional deities emerging in one place, but attaining a popularity that allowed their cult to spread to other places. Frequently, the veneration of a deity would follow the migration of a group of people from one part of China to another. It might also be tied to location—mountains, rivers, and oceans—or a particular occupation—farming, the military. Most often, the spread of a deity would follow news that the deity had proved particularly adept at solving an important problem, be it the inability to bear children, illness, drought, or interruption of the food supply. The ability to protect people from calamity would ensure the place of any given deity.

Once deified, a deity would be given special attention on their birthday, and where competing deities existed in a community, the birthdays of the various deities would become the additional days for festivities. The suppression of traditional Chinese religion throughout China during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s led to the suppression of much traditional practice, from which the revival of traditional festivals within China is still recovering. A full cycle of such festivals, however, can still be seen in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. A list of the most popular festivals would include the birthdays of Che Kung, Guan Yin, Kwan Tai, Mazu, Monkey King, Nezha, Pak Tai, and the Third Prince.

These deities, and many others, are celebrated throughout the China and the Chinese diaspora. It means that wherever there is a significant population of people of Chinese heritage, almost every week will provide the occasion for a celebration. Some of these can be quite large events and have become items now marked by tourist authorities seeking to bring visitors to their hometown.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Chinese New Year's (Preliminary Festival); Chinese New Year's Day; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Dragon Boat Festival; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Laba Festival; Lantern Festival (China); Mazu Festival, Goddess; Mid-Autumn Festival; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Pak Tai, Birthday of; Pure Brightness Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the; Ullam-bana.

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Chinmayananda, Commemoration Days for (May 8, August 3)

Swami Chinmayananda, a renowned scholar of the Hindu scriptures and the head of the international Chinmaya Mission, was born Balakrishnan Menon, in Kerala in southern India, on May 8, 1916. As a young man, he finished college and then became active in the movement for Indian independence, for which he was briefly jailed. Not a particularly religious person, while working for a newspaper he decided to write an exposé of the gurus, whom he thought to be frauds. His research led him to Swami Sivanada Saraswati (1887–1963) in Rishikish. He never completed the exposé, but rather, he underwent a profound religious awakening. In 1949, Sivananda initiated Balakrishnan as a sannyasin (a member of the renounced order). He took the name Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati. Chinmayananda means “filled with the bliss of pure Consciousness.”

Swami Sivananda sent the new sannyasin to a prominent Vedanta scholar, Swami Tapovanam (1889–1957), with whom he studied Vedantic texts until commissioned as a teacher.

Swami Chinmayananda began his public work in 1951 when he led the first of what he called a *jnana yajna*, a term he coined for the activity performing a ritual of worship (*yajna*) at the altar of wisdom (*jnana*), a variation on *jnana yoga*, or approaching the divine by study of the scriptures. The students who became his close associates formed the Chinmaya Mission in 1953. As he expanded his teaching work, the mission spread around the world. He died on August 3, 1993, and left behind more than 35 books he had authored.

Members of the Chinmaya Mission especially remember him twice annually on the anniversaries of his birth (May 8) and his passing (August 3). On those days, members will gather at their local Chinmaya center for a general time of festivity that might include a meal, talks on Chinmaya and his significance and accomplishments, and the sharing of memories of him.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Sivananda Saraswati, Birthday of Swami; Tejomayananda, Birthday of Swami.

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Chittirai Festival

The Chittirai Festival is one of the largest Hindu festivals of southern India. It occurs at several places in the state of Tamil Nadu, but finds its largest focus at the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai. It takes place in the Tamil month of Chittirai (the Hindu lunar month of Chaitra, which is April–May on the Common Era calendar). The festival brings together the Shavite and Vaishana communities of a single, two-part celebration, originally two separate festivals that once took place a few weeks apart. The Telegu (Andhra-born) king of Madurai, Tirumala Nayak (1623–1659), brought the two festivals together.

The Madurai (and Shavite) part of the celebration tells the tale of the goddess of Madurai, Meenakshi (another name of Parvati), and of her marriage to Sundreshvara (another name for Shiva). Thousands gather at the Meenakshi Temple, which is the central monument in the center of the city of Madurai, having four main towers that reach 100 feet into the air. The festival lasts 12 days, but it is the 10th day that is most dramatic when the huge temple chariot upon which Meenakshi and Sundreshvara rest is pulled by devotees through the streets around the temple. This temple chariot is elaborate and includes wheels some 10 feet in diameter. The canopy over the divinities reaches 40 feet into the air. Devotees vie to pull on the heavy ropes used to move the chariot on its circumambulation of the temple. This temple parade follows the reenactment of the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundreshvara.

The Madurai festival takes on added importance because of the association, traditionally, of the kings of Madurai with Shiva. Thus, the marriage of Shiva to Meenakshi not only joins an Aryan and Brahmanical divinity to an indigenous, non-Aryan goddess, but symbolizes (and legitimizes) the power of the monarchy by symbolically linking Shiva and the people through the king.

As the festival in Madurai proceeds, Vaishnava devotees turn their attention to the mountains some 70 miles west of Madurai, where the deity Alakar, a form of Vishnu, slowly proceeds toward the city along the banks of the Vaikai River. Vishnu is seen as the brother of Meenakshi, and travels to Madurai to give the bride away. As he reaches the Vaikai River, just in sight of the great temple, however, he discovers that he has arrived late to the wedding and must return. The Vaishnava aspect of the Chittirai Festival lasts nine days, beginning after the other festival begins. (Most prominent in this part of the festival are the Kallar community, made up of relatively low-caste devotees of Vishnu.)

Constance A. Jones

See also Diwali; Magha Purnima; Mahashivaratri.

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Chokhor Duchen

Chokhor Duchen is the third of four major Tibetan Buddhist festivals that commemorates events in the Buddha's life. This day, equivalent to Asalha Puja or Dhamma Day among Theravada Buddhists, celebrates the Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment and the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. Buddha's enlightenment occurred at Bodhgaya, Bihar, and his first discourse at Sarnath, in what is now the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The teachings at Sarnath summarized the basics of the Buddhist path and were later written down as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. Here also, the Buddhist Sangha, or community of monks, was formed.

Tibetans celebrate this day with pilgrimages to sites considered particularly holy, the choice of such sites becoming more difficult to discern in recent times due to the dispersion of the Tibetan community. It had been the practice of Buddhist priests and lay people to join in processions on this day, parading statues of the Buddha and bodhisattvas and copies of the Buddhist sutras. In the diaspora, this is a day for gathering in Buddhist centers for readings of the sutras and prayer time.

The term "chokhor" refers to the prayer wheels, devotional objects commonly seen in Tibetan Buddhist locations. The chokhor is a cylinder within which are multiple copies of a mantra—most commonly *Om Mani Padme Hum*, which is believed to call upon Chenrezig (Guan Yin), the bodhisattva of compassion. The

mantra is also printed or etched on the outside of the cylinder (usually in Tibetan). In turning the wheel, each revolution is considered equivalent to one repetition to the mantra. The prayer wheel connects with the events at Sarnath, generally termed the first turning of the wheel of Dharma (or propagating of the Buddhist faith). The turning of prayer wheels is a popular devotional exercise in Tibetan Buddhism.

Chokhor Duchon is celebrated on the fourth day of the sixth month of the Tibetan calendar, usually in July on the Common Era calendar.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Butter Lamp Festival; Dalai Lama's Birthday; Losar; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; Sakya Dawa Festival; World Peace Ceremony.

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Chongmyo Cherye (May)

On the first Sunday of May each year, descendants of the Yi family of Korea, which once ruled the nation, gather at the Chongmyo Royal Shrine in Seoul for a relatively rare Confucian ceremony. The shrine contains the ancestral tablets memorializing the 27 monarchs of the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). Each tablet gives the name, titles, and accomplishments of one former ruler.

Strict adherence to Confucian principles were characteristic of the Yi family, and during the years of their regime, stylized Confucian rituals called Chongmyo Cherye were held at the shrine five times annually year. The ceremonies provided the occasion for reporting the status of the country to the spirits of the departed kings. Today, the descendants of the royal Yi family gather at the shrine each year on the first Sunday in May, and reenact these rites in a somewhat simplified form. At the ceremony, each former ruler is greeted respectfully with offerings of wine and the smoke of incense.

The ceremony is best known for the formalized line dancing that is featured. Ilmu (or line dancing) originated in ancient China but was introduced into Korea in the 12th century. It is used to honor people of high status, including intellectuals and rulers, with distinct elements indicating the exact status. Dancers are accompanied by two little-used traditional musical instruments, the *pyongyong* (stone chimes) and *pyonjong* (bronze bells).

The Ilmu dance for a king, termed the *pal-ilmu*, features eight rows of eight dancers. Their performance has two parts, the *munmu* (or civil dance) honoring

literary and scholarly achievement, and the *mumu* (or military dance) honoring martial feats. In the first, they hold a flute and a dragon-headed stick, and in the latter, they wield various weapons (swords, spears, and bows and arrows).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Confucius, Anniversary of the Death of; Confucius' Birthday; Munmyo Ceremony.

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Chongyangjie. See Double Ninth Festival

Chotrul Duchen. See Butter Lamp Festival

■ Christianity

Christianity, which claims the allegiance of some 30 percent of the world's population, traces its origins to the ministry of Jesus, a Jewish teacher who lived in Palestine at the beginning of the Common Era. He built a small following during his brief ministry, but in the context of the Roman occupation of Judea, he ran afoul of the authorities and was put to death around 30 CE. Shortly after his death and burial, a number of his followers had an intense experience of Jesus, whom they claimed had been resurrected physically. Some also claimed to have been present when Jesus was seen ascending into the clouds and disappearing in the heavens. Those of his close associates in his earthly ministry, and who professed to have seen Jesus in his resurrected state, became known as apostles.

The apostles assumed leadership of the discouraged followers. Following a time of internal prayer and consultation, the apostles, now headquartered in Jerusalem, made a profession of their faith in Jesus and in his resurrection. They identified him as the expected Anointed One, the Messiah in the Jewish tradition, termed in Greek the Christ. The launching of their public ministry during the Jewish festival of Pentecost was accompanied by the extraordinary manifestation of in which the apostles speaking was heard by many who did not speak Aramaic (the apostles' common tongue) in their own language.



Jesus dines with his apostles in *The Last Supper* as depicted by Gustave Dore in his 1866 bible. (Dore, Gustave, *Bible*, 1866)

The “church” (in Greek, “ecclesia”), as the collectivity of Jesus’s followers were designated, grew quickly in Jerusalem and then in other nearby towns. The church’s growth was marked by several turning points. First the Apostle Peter convinced the community that following the Jewish law should not be a requirement of membership, thus opening the Church to Gentiles. Subsequently, Saul, a Jewish leader who had worked to suppress the movement, converted; took a new name, Paul; and began the most prominent advocate of the faith he had previously persecuted. Paul, who was born and raised in Tarsus (in present-day Turkey) traveled on three missionary journeys from Jerusalem and Syria across the Mediterranean to Greece (where he introduced Christianity to Europe) and on to Rome. He nurtured the people and congregations he had called to faith with a set of letters, now a part of the Christian scriptures.

No writings are attributed to Jesus directly, but soon after the Church began, collections of sayings attributed to him were collected, and commemorations of the events of the last week of Jesus’s life observed. Jesus was remembered for his compassion, his healing of those who came to him (including some of leprosy), and his proclamation of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God. Many of his teachings were delivered in pithy statements, others as parables. The major events at the end of his earthly existence, that occurred during the annual Jewish Passover festival, were named and commemorated with ritual, beginning with Palm Sunday

(when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem), Good Friday (when he was executed on a cross), and Easter (when he was believed to have risen from the dead). The collections of sayings and stories would later be collected in chronicles of Jesus's life, called gospels.

Through the first century, Christianity gradually separated itself from its rootedness in the Jewish community. That separation was spurred both by the Church's penetration of "Pagan" society, and the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. Roman persecutions of the Christian community served to further distinguish it from the Jews. Anti-Jewish statements made as the church became a distinctive community would in later centuries be used by Christian rulers to legitimize actions against Jews.

Through the first several centuries, a large spectrum of Christian writings, and the question of which writings were authoritative, came to the fore. The importance of choosing the correct writing to guide the Church was accentuated by the rise of Christian Gnosticism, a popular teaching that challenged the worldview of the older Christian. Over the next centuries, those books determined to have been written by the Paul, the original apostles, and their honored colleagues (such as the physician Luke) were brought together to constitute the Christian New Testament, which, placed together with the Jewish Bible (called the "Old Testament" by the Christians), constituted the Christian scriptures.

The Spread Eastward

While Christianity spread around the Mediterranean Basin, it also moved eastward from Jerusalem and Antioch into Mesopotamia and Persia. Edessa (modern Urfa, Turkey), the first center of Christianity outside of the Roman Empire, became the point from which Christianity found its way into the Persian Empire and beyond. Very early in the Christian era, the town was associated with Thomas, one of the apostles, and Thaddeus (or Addai), an early Christian also mentioned in the Bible (Luke 10:1). According to legend, Addai came to Edessa and became the instrument of the healing of the ruler, King Abgar, leading to the conversion of the tiny kingdom of Osroene. Addai is revered as the founder of the Church of the East, and his disciples Addai and Mari with the further expansion of the Church among the Armenians and Persians as far east as India.

Vying with Edessa in the East was Arbela, capital of another small kingdom, Adiabene, whose ruler has in the first century converted to Judaism. In the second decade of the second century, the bishop of Arbela, Semsoun, is said to have become a martyr to his faith. It is also near Arbela that Tatian the Assyrian (c. 110–180) opened a school. His most lasting contribution was a translation of the four Gospels that had emerged as authoritative in the West into a single harmonized gospel, the Diatessaron. The Diatessaron was used for several centuries as the gospel section of the New Testament for the Eastern Church. Tatian also impressed upon the Eastern Church his own asceticism that became an early impetus to monasticism.

By the end of the second century, the Christian community had spread eastward as far as Bactria, in what is now Afghanistan. It had gained strength throughout the Persian Empire. One of the oldest traditions within this community also spoke of the Apostle Thomas continuing his mission to the East by traveling to the Malabar Coast of India and there establishing Christianity in what would undoubtedly be its easternmost outpost. Landing around 50 CE, he is said to have founded seven churches and was eventually martyred. The legendary origins of the Indian church underlay the more firmly historical accounts of the arrival of the theologian Pante-nus from Alexandria on a missionary journey toward the end of the second century. By the end of the fourth century, regular communications between the Indian Christians and the Church of the East indicate a developing relationship that continues to the present through the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

Doctrinal Development

The rise of Christianity as an international movement also coincided with the Church's development of a maturing theological outlook and turning of its attention to the issuance of a consensus statement of Christian belief. As the Church spread, various movements had challenged the central tradition, including the very popular Gnostic movement and the third-century Montanist movement championed by Tertullian, one of the early church's intellectual leaders. Then, at the beginning of the fourth century, a controversy arose concerning the nature of Christ, whom the Church termed the son of God and worshipped as divine. This controversy flowered in the aftermath of the legalization of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.

Arius (c. 260–336), an Egyptian Christian priest, challenged the generally held belief in the divinity of Christ. He argued that such a belief contradicted monotheism. He suggested instead that Christ was a superior creation of God, properly called the son of God, but not God. To resolve the controversy caused by the spread of Arian ideas, Constantine called a church council to meet at Nicea (in what is now Turkey). The Council of Nicea (324 CE) condemned Arius and issued a creedal statement that would become the most widely accepted summary of the orthodox Christian belief in the Triune God. The Nicene Creed would find its way into the liturgies of the Church both East and West. The orthodox position, generally associated with Bishop Athanasius (c. 300–373), the bishop of Alexandria, defined the one God manifesting as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ as both fully God and fully human.

The Nicene Creed set the direction for the church as a whole, but did not solve all of its problems. Arianism was a movement, especially among the people who lived on the northern edge of the Roman Empire. It would peak in 410 when Arian Christians (the Barbarians) would invade Italy from the north and sack Rome. The fall of Rome was the beginning of the end of the empire in the Western Mediterranean. Meanwhile, in the surviving Eastern Byzantine Empire, church leaders were concerned with the theological debates that grew out of the decisions at Nicea. Subsequent councils were called in 381 (Constantinople) and 431 (Ephesus). The Council of Ephesus condemned the opinions of Bishop Nestorius

(c. 381–451) who appeared to divide the human and divine natures of Christ, thus destroying the unity of his personhood. He had also attacked the use of the term *theotokos* (literally, “Mother of God”) to describe Mary, the mother of Jesus. He feared the increasing veneration of Mary as a semidivine figure in Christian mythology. A fourth council gathered at Chalcedon in 451, where a further definition of the Trinity was accepted and a new heresy, monophysitism, denounced.

The decisions promulgated by the Councils of Ephesus and especially Chalcedon were not accepted by the dioceses that lay beyond the Roman Empire to the East, whose bishops had been unable to attend, and the Church in Egypt, the primary loser at Chalcedon. As a result, a number of churches separated from the main body of Christians within the Roman Empire, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the east, and the Coptic Orthodox Church. Although traditionally condemned by the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches as heretical bodies (Nestorian and Monophysite), in recent years, their leaders have argued that they were not opposed to Chalcedon and that the heresies there condemned falsely characterized their actual position. In the 20th century, these non-Chalcedonian churches would be fully admitted into the larger ecumenical world.



A 15th century wooden altarpiece depicting the Madonna and child at Maria Laach. (Corel)

Developing Commemorations

As distance developed between the Church’s membership and the founding events and personages of the faith, a means of remembering, commemorating, and reliving the beginnings of Christianity were developed. Initially, the events surrounding Jesus’s last days were celebrated—his entrance into Jerusalem; his last supper with the apostles; his arrest, torture, and crucifixion; and most importantly, his resurrection. His epiphany or the manifestation of his divine nature at his baptism opened the earliest gospel (Mark) to be followed in the gospels of Luke and Matthew with accounts surrounding Jesus’s birth. The New Testament books would become the major source of information from which a biography of Jesus would be developed and events selected for commemoration. These would reach back

to the announcement by the angel to Mary that she would soon become pregnant with Jesus. Beginning with Jesus's birth, a variety of events in his life would be celebrated with a special day—his meeting when but age 12 with the elders in the temple at Jerusalem, his baptism by John the Baptist, his transfiguration before his apostles, his entrance into Jerusalem, the last supper, the crucifixion, the resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and his sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Once the secular authorities came to privilege Christianity to the exclusion of other religions, the Church began a lengthy and intense process of doctrinal, theological, and liturgical development. Among its many early actions would be the setting of a common date for Easter and Christmas, and the adoption of the Julian calendar as the Church's official calendar. The development of the liturgy and especially of the Church's calendar of events to be celebrated was strongly affected by the era of martyrdom through which it had passed, the development of a cult of relics, and a new theological impulse around the Virgin Mary.

Over the first four centuries of its existence, the Christian movement had periodically been the subject of intense persecution, sometimes regionally, sometimes systematically through the whole empire, most notably during the reigns of the emperors Nero (r. 54–68), Decius (r. 249–251), and Diocletian (r. 248–305). By the second century, a theology of martyrdom proposed it as a means to directly enter heaven, and some Christians seem to court a hero's death. One of the worse periods of persecution occurred just shortly before the rise of Constantine, during the least two years of the reign of Diocletian (303–305). With the era of martyrdom largely behind them, the Church institutionalized a means of remembering and honoring the more noteworthy martyrs as saints on the day of their death. The addition of numerous saint's days to the Church calendar did much to fill it out beginning in the fourth century.

Constantine's mother was a Christian, and after he settled in his new capital of Constantinople, his mother journeyed to the Holy Land, where she discovered and retrieved numerous items, which her informants claimed to be relics of (in this case items associated with) Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the apostles. Many of these items were transported back to Constantinople and later distributed around the Christian world. These relics became objects of veneration, which at the same time promoted veneration of the persons associated with them. The number of relics, especially in the West, rose significantly after the First Crusade and again after the takeover of Constantinople by crusaders in 1204. By this time, several of the relics, especially of the wood that, it was believed, came from the cross on which Christ died, became the source of new holiday celebrations, generally termed feast days.

Beginning with the council of Nicea (324), the church was free to engage in theological debate and development internationally. The major item to initially engage the bishops was the divine status of Jesus, who was defined as fully human and fully divine, a major step in the definition of the unique Christian doctrine of the Trinity, one God manifest as Three. The definition of Jesus as divine also led to speculation concerning the Virgin Mary. If Jesus was fully God, then she who

bore him could properly be called the “Mother of God.” After some debate, the church finally agreed, and in 451, at the council that gathered at Ephesus (in what is now Turkey), the Virgin Mary was declared *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. This declaration would later become the foundation for broad speculations about the Virgin and motivate the first significant wave of veneration for the Virgin Mary. It would ultimately lead to a variety of celebrations of events in Mary’s life traced back to her mother becoming pregnant with her, an event now termed the Immaculate Conception in the Western Roman tradition. Drawing on apocryphal literature, Christians began to commemorate several events prior to those recounted in the New Testament, including Mary’s birth and her presentation in the temple as a child, as well as the end of her earthly life.

The Church of the Middle Ages

Once the canon of the Christian New Testament was set and Christian orthodoxy defined, the Church would be set to continue its expansion for the next several centuries. In the West, Christianity became the dominant religious force throughout Europe, from Constantinople, to Spain, Ireland, and Scandinavia. Five leading centers of the faith would emerge at Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople. To the east and south, however, that dominance would be checked by the sudden rise of Islam.

Within a generation of Muhammad’s death (632), Muslim forces overran Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, and during the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), the Arab Muslim kingdom was extended across North Africa into Spain. Its expansion was finally turned back north of the Pyrenees. Eastward, it crossed Persia and moved into central Asia and what is today Pakistan. Islam effectively blocked further Christian expansion in Africa and the Middle East. Three of the ancient Christian centers (Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria) fell into Muslim hands, leaving the Patriarchate at Constantinople the unquestioned leading voice of Christianity in the Byzantine Empire. The effective leadership of Constantinople extended into the Balkans and then to the northern Slavic lands, and then to Russia (by the end of the first millennium CE).

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire (576), the Roman Catholic Church was left as the most important international organization in Europe. Its authority was more firmly established during the reign of Gregory I (c. 540–604) who reformed the church both organizationally and financially during his pontificate (590–604). Over the next 400 years, as the church extended its control over Europe, allegiance to Christ and his church went hand-in-hand with an acknowledgment of papal hegemony.

The rivalry between the Eastern and Western churches was marked by the cultural distinctions between the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East; however, it was fueled by mutually exclusive claims of primacy by Jerusalem (where the Church began), Rome (where Peter and Paul ministered), and Constantinople (the seat of power in the continuing Roman Empire). Pope Leo I (440–461)

asserted Rome's primacy. In the east, a collegiality of authority was claimed for the five Patriarchies (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome). However, the relationship between the Patriarchies shifted significantly after Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were incorporated into the Arab Muslim Empire. Real power was left in the hands of Rome and Constantinople.

The very different situation of Rome and Constantinople also began to be reflected in their approach to church-state relations. Over the ensuing centuries, numerous additional distinctions in theological concerns, liturgical variations, and monastic life accumulated and gave the Western and Eastern churches a somewhat different flavor. The accumulating differences culminated in a break between the two churches in 1054 over a seeming minor theological difference concerning a difference in wording of the Nicene Creed, with both sides issuing anathemas and excommunications against the other. The Roman Catholic Church now emerged as the single religious institution of note in the West. In the East, four separate churches representative of Eastern Orthodoxy appeared—the Patriarchate of Constantinople (generally referred to as the Ecumenical Patriarchate), the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East.

The Second Millennium of Christianity

In the centuries immediately following the split between the Eastern and Western churches, much of the energy of both bodies was spent upon the creation of a Christian culture in the lands over which they had religious hegemony. The stability of the Western Church allowed it to turn some of its attention to Islam. In 1095, Pope Urban II (r. 1088–1099) proclaimed a crusade against Islam aimed specifically at reclaiming prominent Christian sites in Palestine from the then rulers. Over the next centuries, conflict continued, and in 1187, Saladin (1138–1193) recaptured Jerusalem, initiating a new period of Islamic expansion. In 1204, crusaders, frustrated in accomplishing their original goal, turned on Constantinople, which they sacked.

During this same period, the Eastern Church was enjoying a great expansion. Around 988 CE, Prince Vladimir of Kiev (r. 980–1015) converted to Christianity, in its Eastern Orthodox form. This expansion of Christianity into Russian territory was slowed by the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, but when the Russians finally threw off the Mongol rule in 1449, Moscow emerged as a new center of a modern Russian state. Its importance would be greatly enhanced when four years later, Constantinople fell to the expanding Ottoman Muslim Empire. Once established in Constantinople (renamed Istanbul) Muslim armies moved north and west, incorporating Bulgaria, Romania, the Balkan lands, and Hungary into the Ottoman Empire. Early in the 16th century, Muslim armies reached the gates of Vienna. The expansion in the Danube Valley was countered by the resurgence of Christian forces in Spain, which pushed the Muslim rulers out of Europe, the completion of the process signaled by the fall of Granada in 1492.

Events in Spain did not deter Muslim forces in their drive into central Europe. In the 1520s, they moved to the gates of Vienna, but failed to capture it in 1529. The attention given to the Islamic threat would distract Catholic attention to the new threat coming from Germany.

The Drive for Reform

Almost as soon as the Roman Catholic Church constructed the organizational, liturgical, and theological system through which it would exercise its spiritual authority throughout Western Europe, problems began to manifest. The church, having grown wealthy, had also developed signs of corruption. One symbol of its corruption was the emergence of two popes contending for power in the 14th century. Several councils were called to bring about reform, but while healing the schism at the top, failed to bring about real reform.

To understand the cry for reform, it is somewhat helpful to understand the organization and belief system out of which the church operated. Europe was divided into a set of geographical parishes, each parish having a church whose priest(s) served the people residing in the parish. Parishes were grouped into dioceses, each diocese being headed by a bishop, and the older and more prominent dioceses were designated archdioceses. Both priests and bishops were expected to lead celibate lives. Within his own diocese, the bishop was the ultimate authority, but himself owed authority to the pope, the bishop of Rome. The ultimate authority in the church was a church council, consisting of all the bishops meeting in assembly, but such assemblies were rarely held.

Celebrating the Sacraments

The church had evolved around a sacramental system in which worship centered on a series of ceremonies that were believed to make available the grace of God to those who participated in it. The sacraments were designed to meet the needs of each individual from birth to death. Soon after birth, infants were baptized and welcomed into the realm of God's fellowship, the church. As they entered their teen years, individuals were confirmed in the faith. Along the way, they would be introduced to the practice of confession of sins and penance (making restitution for sin) and the reception of the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, the Last Supper of Christ with his disciples would be reenacted daily. In that supper, Jesus likened the bread and wine that he shared with those present to his body and blood. The reenactment of the meal would recall his death and resurrection. Through the centuries, the church had come to believe that Christ was somehow present in the elements of bread and wine. Drawing a philosophical distinction between the essence and the appearance of different substances, the Roman Catholic Church had articulated a belief in transubstantiation, that as the word of consecration was pronounced in the Eucharistic ceremony, the substance

(though not the appearance) of the bread and wine were transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

Ideally, each person would regularly confess their sins to a priest, receive the forgiveness of their sins, and do the required penance required, after which he or she would attend the Eucharist. The regular reception of the Eucharist was seen as leading to the increasing holiness of the individual.

At the end of one's life, final unction offered forgiveness of as-yet-unconfessed sins, thus preparing one for the next life. Following death, the church would oversee the funeral and burial of one's body in consecrated ground. At death, it was believed that one passed to one of three realms. Those who refused the graces mediated through the church went to eternal damnation in hell. Those who died in a state of holiness went to heaven. The great majority, however, were seen as moving to an intermediate state, purgatory, where the remaining penance for sins was completed prior to entering heaven.

While church life largely revolved around the Sunday, a day of rest and worship, the celebration of the Eucharist was a daily event at local churches, and especially those in towns and large cities. It was common for people to gather each day for Mass before heading off to the day's labors. By the Middle Ages, the church had developed a liturgical calendar which made every day special, if only in a small manner. The year was, of course, punctuated with commemorations of the most important Christian events—Christmas, Easter, Pentecost—to which had been added a variety of remembrances of a host of events in the life of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and several of the New Testament notables—John the Baptist, Paul, the apostles. Then, on most every day of the year, a particular saint was acknowledged. People were often named for the saint on whose day they were born, thus tying birthday celebrations to the church's liturgy. Increasing, there were multiple saints for any given day.

The Protestant Reformation

Given the pervasiveness and the structure of the church, corruption had assumed some predictable forms. However, by the 1520s, the belief that the church possessed a storehouse of grace that it could at will dispense to believers and thus reduce their time (or that of a loved one) in purgatory became the focus of widespread criticism. Typically, a believer could receive an indulgence, a dispensation from the storehouse of grace, by the performance of some act of piety such as a pilgrimage or the repetition of a number of prayers. However, increasingly, the Church began to exchange indulgences for gifts of money, a practice that soon allowed the development of fund-raising projects through the systematic selling of indulgences. What became known as the Protestant Reformation was occasioned by such a fund-raising effort.

In the second decade of the 16th century, the pope picked up the idea of building Saint Peter's Cathedral in the Vatican. In 1517, as the effort to sell indulgences

moved across Saxony, Martin Luther, a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, objected by posting a set of theses (debating points) on the door of the local castle's chapel. Many church leaders agreed with Luther's challenge, and by the early 1520s, Luther was broadly attacking church authority. He challenged church traditions that had created the sacramental system in the name of the Bible, which he saw as the authority over that of the pope, church councils, and traditions. He attacked the sacrament of penance with an assertion of the priesthood of all believers. He undermined the role of the church in human salvation by his assertion of salvation by grace through faith alone. Outlawed and excommunicated, he nevertheless found many allies. Ultimately, Luther's challenge to Roman authority divided the Western Church into five competing communities.

Luther's own teachings would come to dominate in Germany and flow northward into Scandinavia. In German-speaking Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) would emerge as the leader of a Reformation effort that would offer further challenges to the sacramental system. Zwingli's effort would be cut short by his untimely death in 1531. However, his effort would then be taken up in Geneva (French-speaking Switzerland), by John Calvin (1509–1564), whose *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) would be the first systematic presentation of the Protestant faith and the bedrock of the Reformed Church. The Reformed Church would become the dominant form of Protestantism in Switzerland and Holland and as Presbyterianism in Scotland. Although not becoming the majority faith, it would gain significant followings in a number of countries such as France and Hungary, and exert considerable influence in some of the German states.

The Reformation followed a different but no less real course in England. The very Catholic British king, Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547), encountered two main problems: lack of money, and lack of a male heir to the throne. He broke with Rome when he attempted to annul his marriage to his equally Catholic wife, Catherine of Aragon, and then moved to make up his budgetary needs by taking the property of the church's monasteries. Meanwhile, Protestant forces grew and came to power after Henry died. The country's status changed under Edward VI (r. 1547–1553), reverted to Catholicism under Mary I (r. 1553–1558), and then arrived at the Anglican compromise during the lengthy reign of Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603). The Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican churches continued to view themselves as established churches with close ties to the secular government, while dissenting groups like the Baptists and Mennonites eschewed any attachments to the ruling powers.

The Age of Exploration

At the time of the Reformation, the expansion of the Christian community had been blocked by the rise of Islam. However, with the discovery of the Americas and the possibilities it offered, a burst of exploratory activity began. Portuguese sailors headed southward along the African coast, and the Spanish directed their efforts across the Atlantic. The pope took upon himself to divide the worlds yet

to be discovered by drawing a line in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean (moved westward in the next year) and declared that all lands discovered west of the line belonged to Spain and all to the east to Portugal. Spain went on to colonize Central and South America and many of the Caribbean islands. Portugal claimed Brazil but directed most of its efforts to the south. Portuguese sailors rounded the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) and made their way into the Indian Ocean. They opened the way for Catholicism to gain its initial footholds in eastern Africa and southern Asia from India to Indonesia. The Spanish would soon follow the Portuguese in the lucrative trade with the lands found along the coasts of the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Much of the work accomplished by Christian missions was negated by the establishment of the slavery system. The church, unfortunately, placed its emphasis on ameliorating the condition of the slaves and converting them to Christianity rather than work toward the destruction of the institution itself.

France and England both ignored the papal grants to Spain and Portugal and soon joined in the exploration effort, focusing on North America and the Caribbean. Eventually they would both build a global colonial empire.

Protestant Expansion

Initially, Protestant expansion beyond Europe was focused in the move of Dutch, Swedish, and British Protestants to the Americas. Then in the mid-18th century, members of the tiny Moravian Church launched a mission among the African Americans who had been brought to the Caribbean to work plantations. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, the British took the lead in what would become a massive movement that would transform Protestantism into a global faith. Pietists, similar in faith and practice to the Moravians, began the original Protestant mission in Asia, their representatives reaching India in 1706.

Meanwhile, in England, a movement to further purify the Anglican Church slowly grew. The Puritans briefly took power during the Commonwealth under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), but returned to Anglicanism and the monarchy in 1660. Anglicanism was disestablished during the Commonwealth. It was restored in 1660 and has continued since that time. Following the Restoration, those groups dissenting from Anglicanism did not go away, but formed a spectrum of dissenting sectarian bodies, each with its distinctive emphasis. Included were the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Friends (Quakers). They were joined in the 18th century by the Methodists, the spearhead of the Evangelical Awakening that touched every segment of British life.

By the end of the 18th century, a consciousness of the world's community emerged in British society, with the initial response by the Anglicans, Moravians, and Methodists. However, at the end of the century, the dissenting churches began to organize specific structures for world evangelism, the first being the Baptist Missionary Society (1792). Over the next few years, Congregationalists formed the London Missionary Society (1795), and Anglicans founded the Church

Missionary Society (1799). The Methodists, already active overseas, organized their society in 1813, and the Church of Scotland did so in 1823. Through the 19th century, the work initiated in England inspired the formation of like organizations on the European continent and in North America.

Through the 19th century, European missionary agencies succeeded in establishing Christian churches in almost every country of the world, the great majority of those countries either becoming dominantly Christian in religious affiliation or becoming home to a significant Christian minority. Through the 20th century, Catholic and Protestant missions combined to change the world's Christian population from approximately 20 percent to some 35 percent. Most of that growth took place at the expense of the many indigenous, ethnically based, primal religions.

The Twentieth Century

While Christianity was experiencing a remarkable world growth, back home in Europe and North America, the church was being rent by the developments in the modern world. Change was pushed forward by the French Enlightenment and the rise of science and technology, which saw the world much more in terms of natural law than of God working in nature. The subsequent rise of the social sciences served to push God further aside as an active force in history and life of the individual. New intellectual currents included the rise of biblical criticism, with its questioning of both miracles in general and the miracles recorded in the Bible in particular, while geological exploration called the creation stories of the biblical book of Genesis into question.

Although many clung to traditional affirmations, by the end of the 19th century, voices on both sides of the Atlantic were calling for a transformation of Christian thought that acknowledged the new information that was coming out of the centers of learning across the Christian world. The two tendencies would drive the Protestant world into two camps, today grouped around the World Council of Churches (whose member bodies have tended more toward the more modernist approach) and the World Evangelical Fellowship (whose members tend toward the more conservative Bible-oriented camp).

By the beginning of the 20th century, a relatively small number of churches and missionary agencies had established missions in countries around the world. Through the 20th century, those missions matured and became new autonomous churches as European countries largely divested themselves of their colonies. Simultaneously, the global religious community fragmented into many competing denominations, country by country.

The global fragmentation of Protestantism became the major impetus for another international movement, ecumenism. Voices across Christendom cried out for an end of the fragmentation and a uniting of Christian in the one church of Christ. To end the competitive spirit, Protestants created a set of cooperative councils and called for the merger of churches across denominational lines. Notable mergers occurred in India, Pakistan, Canada, and Australia, though in

most areas, the result of ecumenism was limited to a new spirit of respect and co-operation between the missionary churches.

The ecumenical movement peaked in the 1950s and was subsequently given new life in the era of good feeling between Protestants and Roman Catholics that began with the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Ultimately, it was unable to halt the process of setting up new Christian denominations, and the number of new churches has continued to grow decade by decade. However, it has succeeded in bringing most of the larger denominations into a working relationship with each other through local and regional church councils and the international fellowships of the churches of the same denominational traditions (such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches [soon to become the World Communion of Reformed Churches] and the Lutheran World Federation). Most importantly, it has succeeded somewhat in lessening the animosity that developed in the 16th through the 18th centuries, when the establishment of new denominations was accompanied with intense polemics and, in many cases, the attempts of governments to suppress the newer bodies.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Easter; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Pentecost.

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Christmas

The term “Christmas” is derived from the English “Christ’s Mass” and is associated with the Mass that celebrates the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God. The name for this high feast in other languages usually refers to the nativity, such as *Navidad* (Spanish), *Natale* (Italian), and *Noël* (French). The Germanic word “Yule,” the earliest word for the December 25 holiday, probably refers to the winter solstice. The current German word for the feast, “*Weihnachten*,” means “hal-
lowed night.”

Evidence suggests that Christmas was celebrated early in the fourth century in North Africa and by the middle of the fourth century in Rome. By the end of the fourth century, December 25 became the date for most Western churches to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In Eastern churches, the older feast of Epiphany remains the time for nativity observances.

Christmas probably originated in the Roman culture, which celebrated the winter solstice on December 25, the shortest day of the year. It was a Pagan celebration of the birth of “The Invincible Sun” as it began its annual journey back north from its southernmost point. It is likely that Christians began celebrating the birth of Jesus at this time as an alternative to the Pagan observance of the winter solstice. Another, less likely theory suggests that the date for the birth of Christ was based on the idea that his conception coincided with the date of his death, which some consider to be March 25.

Even more than Easter, Christmas became one of the most popular holidays in Western culture. Today, it is celebrated even among those who do not observe other Christian holy days. In the early sixth century, the Roman emperor Justinian

(483–565) made Christmas a public holiday. The feast was extremely popular in all European countries during the Middle Ages, inspiring the composition of music and liturgical drama. Its observance received added impetus in the early 13th century when Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) originated the devotion of the Christmas crib (or *crèche*).

After the 16th century, most of the Reformation churches retained the Christmas feast. However, the English Puritans tried to do away with the celebration of Christmas altogether in the course of the 17th century. The feast was revived with the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. Under the Puritan influence in early America, especially in New England, Christmas was a regular workday until the middle of the 19th century.

Santa Claus is one of the most celebrated features of the Christmas season in Western culture. Also known as Saint Nicholas, Father Christmas, or Kris Kringle (depending on the country in which he is recognized), Santa Claus is the legendary and mythical figure who brings gifts to the homes of the good children during the late evening and overnight hours of Christmas Eve, December 24. The legend may have a basis in tales concerning the historical figure of gift giver Saint Nicholas. He was a fourth-century Greek Christian bishop of Myra in Lycia, now part of Turkey. Nicholas was famous for his generous gifts to the poor, in particular presenting the three impoverished daughters of a pious Christian with dowries in order to avoid a life of prostitution. Consequently, the giving of gifts has become a central focus of the Christmas season.

While the attention given Santa Claus and its attendant commercialization and gift giving has caused concern among many Christians, it is not the only Christmas tradition to have had a wide influence in Western culture, Christian or otherwise. The custom of sending special greeting cards at Christmas originated in 19th-century England.

The Christmas tree has become a traditional decoration for the season. Normally an evergreen, it is adorned with Christmas lights and ornaments during the Advent season and gifts are placed around it. An angel or star is often placed at the top of the tree, representing the host of angels or the Star of Bethlehem from the Nativity story. The practice began in Germany in the seventh century.

Other customs of the Christmas season include the baking of special foods, the cooking of poultry dinners on Christmas Day, and the singing of carols. The celebration of Christmas includes both Christian observances and wider folk customs that have roots in general festivity at the time of the winter solstice. In church sanctuaries, the liturgical colors of Christmas are white and gold, but red and green have come to symbolize the season in popular culture.

Christmas is one of the most celebrated of holidays. In North America, it has become a public holiday with significant secular components, and is celebrated by Christians and non-Christians. Around the world, it is celebrated in numerous ways, with many different local activities surrounding it through the Advent and Epiphany seasons, including many variations on the appearance of Saint Nicholas (a.k.a. Santa Claus) in many religious and secular forms. Among the most unique

celebration of Christmas is the Genna celebration in Ethiopia. As Christianity has spread globally, it has emerged as a popular holiday even within other religious communities who will exchange Christmas greeting and gifts.

In North America, there are several groups, most in the Adventist tradition (Worldwide Church of God, Jehovah's Witnesses), that make an issue of not celebrating Christmas, which they find to be unsupported by the Bible and of Pagan origins. In addition, a variety of groups have established alternate holidays close to Christmas to provide a celebration for people who wish to participate in the festive season, but reject the celebration of Christmas itself. These alternate celebrations include Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, HumanLight, Festivus, Festival of Light (Rosicrucian), and the revived celebrations of Yule and the Winter Solstice by the Neo-Pagan community.

Kevin Quast

See also Advent; Epiphany; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); Festivus; Genna; Hanukkah; HumanLight; Misa de Gallo; Nicholas, Saint's Day of St.; Posadas, Las; Up Helly Aa; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Christ the King, Feast of

The Feast of Christ the King is one of the newest of the relatively important dates on the annual liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. It was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) as an affirmation of the eventual triumph of Christ's kingdom even in the face of the growing secularism and nationalism that had step by step severely curtailed the temporal power of the church in the previous century.

In the revised liturgical calendar published in 1969, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) renamed the celebration as the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the

Universe. He also assigned it its present date on the last Sunday in the liturgical year (immediately before the beginning of Advent). This date emphasized the celebration's eschatological affirmation that human history is headed toward the universal reign of Christ in spite of all signs to the contrary. Pope Paul also gave the new feast the highest rank, what is termed a "Solemnity," a means of emphasizing its importance though lacking the sanctity of tradition.

The new feast has had an interesting history. It was, of course, listed as a special day on the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical year, and subsequently was assigned scripture lessons to be read in worship services throughout the year. The 1983 lectionary of scripture lessons, prepared by the Catholic Church, has, in an act of ecumenism, been adopted for use by a number of mainstream Protestant groups associated with the World Council of Churches and through the lectionary, the Feast of Christ the King has found its way onto the annual liturgical calendar of those churches that use the common lectionary.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Advent; Corpus Christi, Feast of.

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Chung Yeung Festival. See Double Ninth Festival

Circumcision, Feast of the (January 1)

In the Christian Church's celebration of the events in the life of Jesus, his circumcision and formal naming (mentioned in Luke 2:21) was assigned a date eight days after the celebration of his birth on December 25. It emerged in the sixth and seventh centuries and is traditionally understood to commemorate Jesus's initiation into the Jewish faith, analogous to the baptism of Christian children. It is also another assertion of Jesus's complete physical humanity.

This event was, in Eastern Orthodox churches, combined with the celebration of the New Year. As the countries in which Eastern Orthodoxy was the dominant

religion adopted the Common Era calendar as the calendar for the government and secular society, this celebration fell on January 14.

In 1969, the Feast of the Circumcision was dropped from the Roman Catholic calendar and replaced with the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. At the same time, the Feast of the Circumcision is continued in the Anglican and Lutheran churches, both noting its biblical base.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Epiphany; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Clement of Ohrid, Saint's Day of St. (August 9, July 17)

Saint Clement of Ohrid, an Eastern Orthodox saint, is primarily remembered in the Bulgarian and Macedonian Orthodox churches. He was one of a group of students of the famous apostles to the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius. Bulgaria had adopted Christianity in 865, following the conversion of the Bulgarian prince Boris-Michael (r. 852–889). At this time, the Bulgarian kingdom reached from the Black Sea to the Adriatic.

Around 886 CE, Clement and his associates Nahum (or Naum), Gorazd, Angelarius, and Sava traveled to the Bulgarian capital (Pliska) and presented themselves to Prince Boris. The group received a warm welcome and was assigned to various tasks aimed at establishing the Slavic language in the place of the Greek-based church culture that had come with the Byzantine church in the 860s. Clement was assigned to Kutmichevica (what is present-day Macedonia), and he settled at Ohrid in what was the southwest region of the Bulgarian kingdom. His original task was the training of a new generation of clergy in the use of Slavonic. Here he would eventually be joined by his colleague Nahum, and together they would create the first Slavonic university, which became a center of culture for the region.

Clement developed a variation of the alphabet originally used by Cyril and Methodius, later to evolve into the Cyrillic alphabet) and he spent much of his time translating Byzantine theological and especially liturgical material into the local language. Made an archbishop in 893, he is remembered for establishing the first Slavic church and creating an indigenous faith in the countries that now make up the southern Slavic lands.

Both Clement and Nahum built churches, and Clement also erected a monastery and shrine to the holy healer Panteleimon. Meanwhile, Nahum erected a monument to the archangels Gabriel and Michael on the Crn Drim River, Clement

died on July 17, 916, and he was buried at Saint Panteleimon monastery in Ohrid.

Saint Clement is remembered on both August 9 and December 8 (Julian calendar) in the Eastern churches' calendar of saints, and is carried on July 17 in the calendar of saints of the Roman Catholic Church. In November 2008, the Macedonian Orthodox Church (recently established as an independent jurisdiction apart from the Serbian Orthodox Church) donated some relics of Saint Clement to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, symbolic of the fraternal relationship between the two bodies. He is considered the patron saint of Macedonia and of the city of Ohrid.

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See also Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts.; Evtimiy of Bulgaria, Saint's Day of Patriarch.

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Columba, Saint's Day of St. (June 9)

Named Crimthann at birth, the Irish monk Columba (ca. 521–597) would become a major figure in the revitalization of monasticism in Ireland and Scotland. He was born in County Donegal and developed an early reputation for having a religious bent. He studied with the revered Finian of Clonard, who ordained him. Then, given some land in County Derry, he moved there and started a monastery. This would be the first of some 30 similar institutions he founded across the island in the next decade.

The same energy and strength of personality that led to the founding of some many monasteries also created some hostilities. In 563, Columba was accused having caused a war between two Irish tribes that saw considerable loss of life. The king exiled him, and he left Ireland. He and 12 monk companions finally settled on a rather small bleak island, Iona, off the Scottish coast. They built a monastery there and used the island as a launching point for evangelical trips into the Scottish countryside. The monastery grew, and Columba would spend the rest of his life there teaching the monks and developing a reputation for saintliness. He died in 597.

After his exile, he returned to Ireland only once. In 575, he was asked to mediate a dispute that had developed between the king and a group of poets. It was

reported that he spoke with such eloquence and forcefulness that the king backed off his earlier decree against the poets and the tense situation was alleviated.

After his death, he was buried on Iona, but at a later date, his remains were taken to Ireland and reburied, reputedly, in Downpatrick, County Down, near the relics of Saint Patrick and Saint Brigid, the other two patron saints of Ireland. Saint Columba's feast day is June 9, celebrated as Saint Columba's Day in Ireland and Scotland, though not to the extent of Saint Patrick's Day or, in the case of Scotland, Saint Andrew's Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Andrew, Saint's Day of St.; Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St.; Saint Patrick's Day.

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Common Era Calendar

The Common Era calendar is the name given to the calendar now used officially in most of the world's countries, and unofficially in the remaining countries, as well as by a variety of international organizations such as the United Nations and the Universal Postal Union. This designation for what is a revised Gregorian calendar has come about in stages, as the Gregorian calendar was accepted in countries where Christianity was not the majority religion and because of a growing sensitivity by scholars, government leadership, and the general public in the West to the presence of other religions in the world.

The Common Era calendar can be traced to the Julian calendar promulgated by Julius Caesar, a revised form of which was accepted as the calendar of the Christian Church in 325 CE. That calendar, which had a small but increasingly important error in its measurement of the length of the year, remained in usage until the 16th century, when Pope Gregory XIII (1502–1585) took the lead in revising it. The Gregorian calendar took root first in European Catholic countries and then in the Protestant countries. It was spread globally in the 19th century, during which time much of the world became part of European empires.

As international trade and government relations increased, the need increased for a globalized way of measuring time, including the definition of the beginning of the day, the designation of a place for measuring the beginning of the new day, and a common means of naming the days, months, and years. The dominant role of the Western nations in world affairs in the late 19th century led to

acceptance of the Gregorian calendar and the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time and the International Date Line. Through the 20th century, the measuring of time has become an increasingly more precise endeavor that has been turned over to an international group of scientists and technicians.

Part of the secularization of the Common Era calendar is the separation of its starting point, the year 1 CE and the defining event it was supposed to commemorate, the birth of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, Jesus's birth was tied to the reign of Herod the Great. Herod is now believed to have died in 4 BCE, thus Jesus's birth would have need to have occurred earlier.

The replacement of the Christian designations for the calendar (AD for *anno Domini*, or year of Our Lord) and BC (Before Christ) with CE (Common Era) and BCE (Before the Common Era) has proceeded rapidly in the West through the last decade of the 20th century into the new century. It is now standard practice in universities, reference books, and political discourse. While the current calendar with all the post Gregorian alterations has moved forward virtually unchallenged, the adoption of Common Era terminology and abbreviations has met with some vocal resistance from some conservative Christian denominations, most notably the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant church in the United States, which in 2000 passed a resolution against using such designations.

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See also Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Calendars, Religious; Mayan Calendar.

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Common Prayer Day

The Common Day of Prayer, or Day of All Prayers, is a unique public holiday in Denmark, celebrated on the fourth Friday after Easter, usually in the month of May. As a public holiday, banks and most businesses remain closed. The day is an artifact of the liturgical calendar that was inherited by the Lutheran Church of

Denmark after the Reformation. It included a number of feast days for minor saints, many no longer relevant to the church in Denmark, and other lesser holidays that filled out the medieval church calendar in the post Easter season. In 1686, King Christian V (r. 1670–1699) suggested to the church that these many holidays be consolidated into a single day's celebration.

The holiday continued through the 1771 reform of the country's holidays under Christian VII (r. 1766–1808) and his prime minister, Count Johann Friedrich von Struensee (1737–1772). While set up as a day of prayer and recognition of the church's saintly people through the ages, it has today been secularized and is celebrated primarily with long walks around town, originally designed to arrive at a place to listen to the church bells that would be sounded through the city on the eve of the holiday in order to announce its imminence. People will also consume, while still warm, a distinctive bread called “varme hveder,” which is designed to be easily reheated given that work was originally forbidden on the holiday. In Copenhagen, church bells will be rung in the evening prior to the holiday.

Common Prayer Day is also celebrated on the Faroe Islands, which belong to Denmark.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; National Day of Prayer; World Day of Prayer.

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Confucius, Anniversary of the Death of (October 1)

Confucius (a.k.a. Kǒng Fūzǐ or K'ung-fu-tzu), who lived in the sixth century BCE, was the most influential philosopher/ethicist in China's history. He was born in what is now the Chinese province of Shantung. As a young man, he started a private school, the first in China, where he taught his philosophy of personal conduct, benevolence, and justice by law. He was eventually named the grand official of justice for the State of Lu. He spent the last 13 years of his life teaching his philosophy at various locations around the country.

After he died, his disciples mourned him, and more than a hundred took up residence near his tomb, creating a new village known as Kung Li. They also planted trees in his honor, the forest that resulted now being called “The Confucius Forest.” Those who did not move to Kung Li scattered across China as advisers to different feudal lords. Over several centuries, Confucius's ideas came to permeate the land.

In the 1930s, the national government of the Republic of China (which was transferred to Taiwan in 1949) officially established the birthday of Confucius as Teachers' Day. Meanwhile, through its first generation, the People's Republic of

China suppressed Confucianism as antimodern. Only in the 1980s was Confucius and Confucian thought rehabilitated, but instead of honoring his birthday, Confucius is honored on the anniversary of his death.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chongmyo Cherye; Confucius's Birthday; Munmyo Ceremony.

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Confucius's Birthday

Confucius (a.k.a. Kǒng Fūzǐ or K'ung-fu-tzu), a sixth-century BCE thinker, was possibly the most influential philosopher/ethicist in China's history. His thought also deeply influenced the neighboring countries of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam and has been spread further through the modern Chinese diaspora.

Much of his thought revolved around the idea of perfecting society by having its citizens engaging in right behavior, which included the avoidance of extreme actions and emotions, being considerate to others, respecting family, and venerating one's ancestors. He found the key to building the happy society in correctly ordering five key relationships, those between ruler and subject, older brother and younger brother, father and son, husband and wife, and two friends.

Confucius's thought permeated all of Chinese society, in time becoming an independent system of thought that competed head on with rival religious thought worlds, especially Buddhism. Confucian was also integrated into other existing systems, especially the world of indigenous Chinese religions. He is honored in China at both Confucian temples and in the circulation of his ideas throughout the schools and within the government.

Confucius was believed to have been born on the 27th day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, placing it somewhere between the last days of September and the first days of November on the Common Era calendar. That date is retained throughout much of the Chinese diaspora. In the Republic of China, Confucius's Birthday is now celebrated on September 28, and heralded as “National Teacher's Day,” as Confucius is seen as the great teacher. Secularized Chinese emphasize the country's resident right to learning and knowledge.



Taiwan's president Ma Ying-jeo addresses an audience during a birthday celebration for Confucius at the Taipei Confucius Temple in Taiwan on September 28, 2010. (AP/Wide World Photos)

The most elaborate celebration occurs at the Confucius Temple in Qufu, Shandong, where Confucius was born. Festivities include impressive ceremonies and rituals, and much music and dance. In celebrations that begin at 4:00 in the morning, practitioners will dress in traditional costumes and perform dances accompanied by using ancient instruments. The event is also a time to recall the prominent ideas of Confucius, especially in celebrations organized among young students.

Incidentally, Teachers Day had been created in China in the 1930s as an effort to build support for and raise the status of teachers. It was originally celebrated in June and then moved to coincide with Confucius's birthday in 1939. In 1951, the People's Republic moved Teachers Day to May 1, where it was submerged in the annual Communist May Day celebrations. Confucianism was suppressed as antimodern, and revived only in the 1980s, after the Cultural Revolution. As Teachers Day gain new prominence and Confucius again recognized as a positive influence on the country, the two themes were again merged.

Outside of the People's Republic, events commemorating Confucius most often occur on the lunar calendar; hence, they are on a different day every year of the Common Era calendar. In countries such as Korea, where Confucian thought still has much support, the events emphasize ceremony and ritual. Through the Chinese diaspora, music and dance predominate.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chongmyo Cherye; Confucius, Anniversary of the Death of; Munmyo Ceremony.

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Conversion of St. Paul, Feast of the

The Apostle Paul, though not one of the original 12 apostles who worked with Jesus during his earthly minister in Palestine, had the most profound effect on the Christian movement as its major missionary during its first generation. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the major source of information on Paul's life, he began his career as one who persecuted the new Christian movement and was present when Stephen, the first martyr, was killed. Subsequently, while traveling to Damascus, he had a visionary experience in which he confronted the risen Christ. As a result of this encounter, he converted to Christianity and would go on to make three missionary journeys around the Mediterranean Basin that are credited with establishing the Church throughout Asia Minor and westward to Rome.

While the book of Acts describes Paul's missionary career, it supplies no dates, and the determination of when the many events it documented occurred must be inferred. Also, the account of Paul's life stops without offering details on the final events of his life, including his death. The determination of dates relative to events in Paul's life is heightened by the lack of firm dates for the events in Jesus's life, most notably the year of the crucifixion, which occurred close to the Jewish Passover and the founding of the Church during the Pentecost festival several weeks later. The martyrdom of Stephen and Paul's conversion experience occurred within in a year or two of the founding of the Church.

In the face of the lacunae in knowledge concerning the events in Paul's life (and Paul's case was by no means unique), people often filled in the story with information from a variety of questionable sources. Most scholars have also pointed out seeming disagreements between Paul's own statements in his letters and the account in the Acts of the Apostles. They generally favor the letters as the more accurate.

In spite of the lack of knowledge of its date, Paul's encounter with Jesus while traveling to Damascus was of great significance to the early church. Paul based his claim to apostleship on it, calling himself an "apostle out of season." The event was integral to his testimony as he founded churches and taught his initial converts.

As the Church emerged out of its three centuries as a clandestine group within the Roman Empire and began to create its shrines and annual cycle of liturgical remembrances, Paul assumed a prominent role. January 25 was eventually designated as the Feast Day of the Conversion of Saint Paul. This day is recognized and celebrated in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and among the Oriental (Non-Chalcedonian) Orthodox churches. Among Protestant churches, this feast day is primarily acknowledged by the Anglican and Lutheran churches, though most Protestants find dating this important event an unbiblical tradition.

This feast day has a relationship to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, today an international Christian ecumenical observance held between January 18 and 25. The week originated as a call by Anglicans to pray for their reunion with Rome.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

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Corpus Christi, Feast of

The Feast of Corpus Christi, officially known as the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, is a celebration of the Roman Catholic Church that developed in the 13th century as a result of the visions of an Augustinian nun, Juliana of Liège (1193–1252). Juliana was known to have a strong interest in the Eucharist, the ceremony in which Christians believe that they receive the body and blood of Christ under the guise of bread and wine. Over a period of time, she developed a yearning for a special festival that would honor the Eucharist. This idea was emphasized by one vision in which she saw a church under the full moon with one dark spot, symbolic of the absence of a solemnity honoring the Eucharist.

Juliana would tell people of the vision for some 20 years before it reached the ears of those who could honor her request, including a young archpriest at Liege Jacques Pantaléon, who would later become Pope Urban IV (r. 1261–1264). Toward the end of his brief papacy, Urban would commission his chief theologian, Thomas Aquinas, to compose a liturgy for the Feast of Corpus Christi. Thomas was at the center of an ongoing theological debate on the nature of the Eucharist that would lead to the church's acceptance of Thomas's view, developed from his understanding of Aristotelian philosophy. Interestingly, the first formal

theological statement of Thomas's understanding of transubstantiation, the manner in which the bread and wine come to exist as Christ's body and blood, appear in his writing relative to the new feast of Corpus Christi.

Among his last acts prior to his death in 1264, Urban IV established the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi throughout the Church. It was the first such feast added to the Church's calendar. The feast is celebrated in the spring on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. It is a holy day of obligation, thus the faithful are supposed to attend Mass and remain in an attitude as if the day was a Sunday. In some countries, the day of obligation is shifted to the Sunday following.

The placement of the Feast of Corpus Christi on a Thursday ties it to Maundy Thursday, and the celebration of the first Eucharist as part of the last week of Jesus's life.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holy Week; Maundy Thursday; Most Precious Blood, Feast of the.

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Counting of the Omer

The counting of the Omer is a Jewish observance that occurs between the feasts of Passover and Shavuot that reminds the faithful of the connection between the former and the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt and the subsequent giving of the Torah (Law) at Sinai; that is, the movement to freedom included the gift of the covenant.

The practice of counting the Omer is derived from a command from God to the children of Israel in Leviticus 23:

Ad-noy spoke to Moshe (Moses), saying,

Speak to Bnei Yisroel and say to them; when you come into the land that I give to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring an *omer* of the first fruits of your harvest to the *kohein* [priest]. He shall wave the *omer* before Ad-noy that it be favorably accepted for you. On the day after the day of rest [Pesach], the *kohein* shall wave it. You shall prepare, on the day when you wave the *omer*, an unblemished, male, yearling lamb as a burnt-offering, to Ad-noy. Its meal-offering is two tenths of flour mixed with [olive] oil as a fire-offering to Ad-noy of pleasing

fragrance. Its wine-offering is one fourth of a *hin*. Bread, parched grain or tender grain you shall not eat until this very day, until you bring the offering of your G-d; it is an everlasting statute for all your generations in all your dwelling places.

You shall count for yourselves, from the day after the day of rest (Pesach) from the day on which you will bring the *omer* wave-offering, seven complete weeks they shall be, until the day after the seventh week, you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring a new meal-offering to Ad-noy.

In years past, prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, on the day after Passover, an omer of grain would be brought to the temple as an offering. Today, beginning the second night of Passover, the observant Jews will recite a blessing prayer and state the count on the days since Passover. The period of the counting is also considered a time of partial mourning, in memory of a large number of the students of Rabbi Akiba Ben Josef (c. 50–c. 135 CE) who died in a plague. The observant will refrain from planning marriages, parties, and haircuts during this time. On Lag b'Omer, the 33rd day of the count, there is a minor break in the observance to remember the achievements of one of Rabbi Akiba's students, and the mourning rules are lifted for that day.

The counting of Omer begins on the Sunday evening of the day after Passover (remembering that in the Hebrew calendar, the new day began at sundown).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Passover; Shavuot.

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Covenant, Day of the (November 26)

The Day of the Covenant is a Bahá'í holy day honoring the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, in particular, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) as the "Centre of the Covenant." This festival is observed alongside the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended.

The Day of the Covenant pays tribute to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, a matter of signal importance to Bahá'ís, in that it is the key to the integrity of the Bahá'í religion. By preserving and perpetuating its indivisibility, the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh protects the Bahá'í religion from schism. In anticipation of his eventual passing, Bahá'u'lláh called on all Bahá'ís to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá

(Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son) as *successor* (inerrant leader of the Bahá'í community), *interpreter* (authorized exponent of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings), and *exemplar* (perfect embodiment of Bahá'í virtues and morality). This triple function has been as powerful in its influence on the future course and fortunes of the Bahá'í community as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station is conceptually and functionally distinctive, and remains so.

Beyond 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself, the Bahá'í Covenant extends to Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), Guardian of the Faith from 1921 until his passing in 1957, and subsequently to the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í international council, elected every five years by national representatives of Bahá'í communities worldwide since its establishment in April 1963. Despite efforts by individuals who sought to aggrandize themselves by claiming authority, the Bahá'í community is an organically unified faith-community, free of schisms or factions.

Historically, the Day of the Covenant was established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to discontinue the practice of early believers who, on their own initiative, used to celebrate his birthday. In a number of locales, the Bahá'ís, beyond celebrating his birthday, also observed the day on which 'Abdu'l-Bahá acceded to the leadership of the Bahá'í community as the designated successor to Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), who passed away on May 29, 1892. Honoring 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birthday was problematic particularly because of this remarkable historical coincidence: 'Abdu'l-Bahá was born on May 22, 1844, which, in fact, was the very same night that the Báb declared his prophetic mission. So, in order not to divert focus from the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, which was a sacred event, 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose November 26 for commemorating the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. According to Bahá'í historian Hasan M. Balyuzi:

'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Bahá'ís that this day [May 22] was not, under any circumstances, to be celebrated as His day of birth. It was the day of the Declaration of the Báb, exclusively associated with Him. But as the Bahá'ís begged for a day to be celebrated as His, He gave them November 26th, to be observed as the day of the appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. It was known as *Jashn-i A'zam* (The Greatest Festival), because He was *Ghuṣn-i A'zam*—the Greatest Branch. In the West it is known as the Day of the Covenant. (Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, 523; brackets added)

The “Most Mighty Branch” is the spiritual title given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Bahá'u'lláh in the latter's Will and Testament—known as the “Book of the Covenant” (*Kitáb-i 'Ahd*). Of this historic document, Shoghi Effendi wrote: “Written entirely in His own hand . . . this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His ‘Most Great Tablet,’ and alluded to by Him as the ‘Crimson Book’ in His ‘Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,’ can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 238).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá purposely selected a date that is six months (i.e., 180 days) on the Common Era calendar away from the commemoration of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension, which temporal distancing entirely removed any formal association between those two observances. In the East, the Day of the Covenant also became known as the “Day of Accession” (*Yawm-i Julús*). In the West, this occasion was first celebrated in 1910, when it was first known as the “Fete-Day of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” or “the Master’s Day,” before it eventually came to be called the “Day of the Covenant.” (Walbridge, *Sacred Acts*, 244–45.)

There are no required observances for this occasion. Typically, the believers (and their invited friends) gather together for a devotional service of prayers and readings from the sacred Bahá’í writings, often interspersed with musical interludes, and usually followed by fellowship and refreshments. The Day of the Covenant, therefore, commemorates the unique Bahá’í Covenant. Shoghi Effendi claimed that “nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world’s religious systems . . . do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá’u’lláh had Himself instituted” (Effendi, *God Passes By*, 238).

On the Day of the Covenant, Bahá’ís honor ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “Perfect Exemplar” of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and as the “Centre of the Covenant” of Bahá’u’lláh, paying tribute to that sacred Covenant, which historically safeguarded and will continue to preserve the unity of the Bahá’í faith-community for centuries to come.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Ascension of; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Cyprian, Saint's Day of St. (September 16)

Cyprian (d. 258) was a wealthy Pagan who converted to Christianity as an adult. He was already known locally in Carthage as an orator. After his conversion, he gave a large portion of his wealth to the poor. At his baptism, he also publicly announced his decision to remain celibate. He went on to become a priest and soon afterward was chosen as the bishop of Carthage.

Then in 250 CE, a wave of persecution instituted by the Roman emperor Decian (r. 249–251) hit North Africa. Many Christians abandoned the Church during this time, and afterward sought reentry. The process by which they could be reinstated became the subject of intense controversy. Cyprian had left Carthage during the persecution and directed the church from his hiding place. Meanwhile, the priest Novatus, who had earlier opposed Cyprian's selection as bishop, assumed authority in the city. He welcomed those who had abandoned the church and made the required acknowledgment of the Pagan deities, without any recompense. Cyprian was happy to receive these people back into the Christian community, but demanded that those who had actually made a sacrificial act to the Pagan gods would not be able to receive the Eucharist until shortly before their death. Others, who did not sacrifice but who had bought certificates saying they had sacrificed, could be readmitted to the Eucharist after a period of penance. This latter criterion would eventually be relaxed during a new wave of persecutions under Decian's successor. During this time, Cyprian also emerged as a friend and ally of Pope Cornelius (r. 251–253), who also had been attacked by Novatus, and who eventually set himself up as an alternative pope and was finally excommunicated.

Cyprian's support locally was strengthened when in the early 250s, Carthage was hit by famine and then an outbreak of plague. He continued his earlier identification with the poor and called upon Christians to assist the ill.

Cyprian came into conflict with Cornelius's successor, Pope Stephen I (r. 254–257). The issue was heresy, and the status of those baptized by heretics. Cyprian refused to recognize the validity of baptism conferred by priests outside the church, that is, by those deemed heretics and schismatics. In his most famous writing on church unity is the oft-quoted statement, "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother." Stephen articulated a more lenient view that eventually, as its doctrinal implications were explored, would be accepted, though Cyprian articulated a position that was far more pastoral than the rigorous views demanded by Tertullian and later the Donatists. This disagreement would not prevent both Cyprian's and Stephen's later canonization.

The debate with Stephen was cut short by the new persecution instituted by the emperor Valerian (r. 253–260) in 256. Stephen was martyred the following year. When arrested, Cyprian refused to acknowledge the Pagan deities and was banished for a year. He was then placed under house arrest in his villa. He was imprisoned on September 13, 258, and the next day sentenced to die and executed (beheaded with a sword) immediately thereafter.

The church built over the site of Cyprian's execution and burial was later destroyed by invading Vandals. Reputedly, Charlemagne (r. 768–814) recovered the relics and distributed them to churches across his empire. Churches in Lyons, Arles, and Venice are now among those claiming to possess Cyprian's relics. His feast day in the Western Church is September 16, and he is commemorated in the Eastern Orthodox churches on August 31. He is considered the patron saint of North Africa.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Augustine of Hippo, Saint's Day of St.

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Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts. (May 11)

Born Constantine and Michael, the saints Cyril (c. 826–869) and Methodius (c. 827–885) are deemed by the Eastern Orthodox churches to be among the few saints also designated as “equal to the Apostles” for their work in spreading Christianity among the Slavic people. In the process of evangelizing Eastern Europe, they devised a new alphabet to translate the Holy Scriptures and other Christian writings into what is now called Old Church Slavonic. Their alphabet evolved into the Cyrillic alphabet that is now used for writing most Slavic languages.

The brothers were born in Thessalonika (Greece) into a well-placed senatorial family. They received good educations in a bilingual setting (Greek and Slavonic). After his father's death, Constantine was sent to Constantinople, where he was ordained and given a position in the emperor's government, building relations with the Muslim Abbasid Caliphate. Meanwhile, Michael went to a monastery on Mount Olympus, where he became a monk and took the name Methodius.

In 860, the Byzantine emperor Michael III and Photius I, the patriarch of Constantinople (r. 858–867), commissioned the brothers for their first missionary venture. They sent the brothers to the ruler (the khagan) of the Khazar people, who resided north of the Black Sea, in an effort to prevent them from adopting Judaism. This initial venture proved unsuccessful, but then in 862, Prince Rastislav of Moravia invited the brothers to his land. He wanted someone who could present Christianity in the native tongue, as opposed to the Latin being used by the German missionaries, previously in the area. This invitation proved decisive, as

it was the catalyst for their development of the new alphabet to use for the translation of the Bible and Orthodox liturgy.

The German missionaries complained to the pope. Moravia was at the time under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church. After laboring for about four years, the brothers were called by Nicholas I (r. 858–867) to appear in Rome to defend their work. The area in which they worked was within Rome's jurisdiction (rather than that of Constantinople). As they headed for Rome, Nicholas died and was succeeded by Pope Adrian II (r. 867–872). Adrian convinced himself of the brothers' orthodoxy and authorized the use of Slavonic in their church services. He even commended their work by consecrating Methodius as a bishop. At the same time, Constantine took monastic vows in the Greek monastery in Rome, and assumed the name Cyril. Unfortunately, he was unable to resume his missionary work, as he died shortly thereafter (probably in February 869).

At the request of several Slavic princes, Adrian II established a new diocese to be the first Slavonic diocese of Moravia and Pannonia. He then appointed Methodius as its archbishop. Methodius had his task cut out for him, as the German bishops, already operating in the same territory, opposed him at every turn. In 870, they called a synod, deposed him, and then imprisoned him. Pope John VIII (r. 872–882) stood by his predecessor's commission of Methodius and, as soon as possible, had him restored to his position. As the issues between the two parties continued, Methodius was forced to accept one of his detractors as a vicar bishop, who repeatedly tried to subvert Methodius's work. The constant pressure is seen as contributing to his demise in 885.

After his death, the work in Moravia (now the Czech Republic) was essentially lost, and the church reverted to German (and hence Latin-Rite) control. However, the Old Slavonic liturgy, the Cyrillic alphabet, and Eastern Orthodoxy would eventually become the instruments for most Slavic peoples to accept Christianity.

Cyril was regarded as a saint almost immediately after his death. His brother's reputation also rose after his passing, and they came to be almost always paired and mentioned together. They became known as known as the "Apostles of the Slavs," and while regarded highly in the Roman Catholic Church, they are especially venerated in Eastern Orthodox circles.

Their feast day is currently celebrated on February 14 by Roman Catholics (a date believed to be the date of Cyril's death), The Eastern churches celebrate their memory on May 11 (May 24 on the Common Era calendar). They were declared patron saints of Europe in 1980. They were also patron saints of two formerly existing countries—Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. They are now seen as patron saints of the Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Saint Stephen's Day (Hungary); Vladimir, Saint's Day of St.

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Czestochowa, Feast Day of Our Lady of (August 26)

The famous icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary housed at a church in Czestochowa, Poland, was discovered by Helena, the wife of the emperor Constantine during her visit of the Holy Land in the fourth century. It was ascribed to the handiwork of Luke, the writer of the Gospel, and returned to Constantinople with Helena. It was later transferred to several locations but, by 802, was in what is now Belarus. In the middle of the 14th century, to prevent damage to it during wartime, Prince Wladyslaw I Lokietek (r. 1320–1333), in order to prevent the destruction of the image, decided to transport it to Poland.

The story is told that when the team of horses pulling the wagon in which the image traveled reached Czestochowa, they refused to proceed any further. Wladyslaw retired to the chapel on the nearby hill of Jasna Gora to pray. He subsequently had a dream in which the Virgin confirmed that the image should remain there. Its previous reputation for protecting the place where it was housed multiplied over the years. Possibly the most famous instance occurred in 1655, when the overpowered Poles were able to repel the invading Swedes. The following year, King John II Casimir (1609–1672) declared the Virgin to be the queen of Poland. Through the years of Soviet influence and Communist domination of the country following World War II, the Virgin of Czestochowa became the symbol of national resistance, an image only reinforced by Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005). On one of his multiple visits, he presented the slash he was wearing on the day in 1981 that he was shot. The bloody piece of cloth now sits encased adjacent to the icon. The present basilica in which the icon is housed was built in 1902.

Pope Clement XI (r. 1700–1721) officially recognized the miraculous nature of the image in 1717, and in 1925, Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) designated May 3 as the feast day to Mary, queen of Poland, in her honor. August 26, the day the horses refused to move out of Czestochowa, is celebrated as the feast day of Our Lady of Czestochowa. The shrine in Czestochowa is now the third most-visited Roman Catholic pilgrimage site in the world.

The two days honoring Our Lady of Czestochowa are also special days at other shrines (mostly established by members of the Polish diaspora) to Czestochowa such as the national shrine at Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and the many local

churches dedicated to her. Late August is a time for a national Polish-American festival at Doylestown.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Perpetual Help, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Dalai Lama's Birthday (July 6)

The present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. July 6, 1935) serves as both the head of the Tibetan government-in-exile and the spiritual leader of the whole of Tibetan Buddhism. He was born in Taktser, Qinghai, Tibet, and as a child of two “recognized” as the reincarnation of the deceased 13th Dalai Lama.

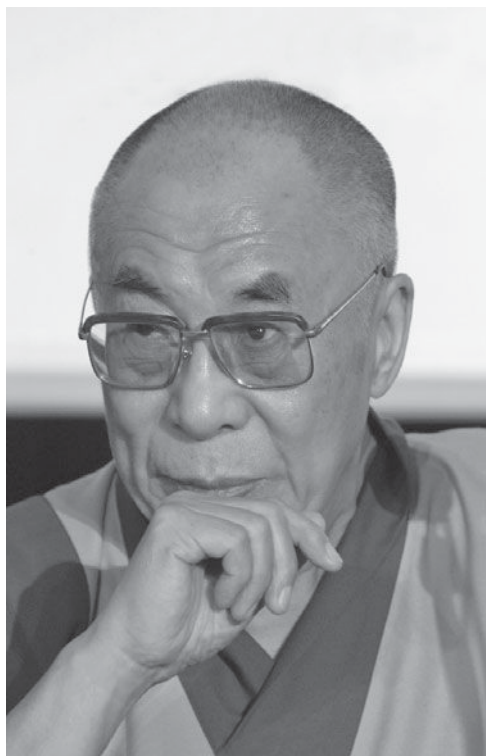
The Dalai Lamas are believed to be emanations of Chenrezig (known outside Tibet as Avalokiteshvara or Guan Yin), the bodhisattva of compassion. He is the most prominent of the several lamas who are believed to be emanations of the various bodhisattvas and thus is an object of veneration.

The present Dalai Lama was still quite young when the Chinese occupied Tibet and he chose to move into exile. He subsequently reorganized the Tibetan community outside of the homeland, which through the last decades of the 20th century scatter globally. Tibetan Buddhism became a world religion, with not many Tibetans assuming leadership positions. The Dalai Lama now resides in Dharamsala, in northern India.

Over his career, he has traveled the globe on behalf of independence and self-determination for Tibet, a cause very much decried by the Chinese government. He has been unable to obtain enough support for any of his various efforts either to return Tibet to its former autonomous status or to negotiate what he feels are a charter of human rights (which he feels are being violated regularly) for Tibet. The Chinese government has regularly opposed attempts for him to establish even an informal relationship with governments and heads of state. He has received a number of awards from nongovernmental organizations, including the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2008, the Dalai Lama announced his semiretirement and turned much of his administrative duties to the Tibetan government-in-exile's elected parliament and the prime minister, Samdhong Rinpoche.

In the meantime, the Dalai Lama has received significant public recognition, especially in the West, as a Buddhist leader and teacher. Among adherents of the different branches of Vajrayana Buddhism, both Tibetan and otherwise, he is considered a semidivine figure worthy of veneration.

July 6 has become a day to celebrate the career of the Dalai Lama, both at Dharamsala and at the numerous Tibetan communities and Tibetan Buddhist centers around the world. Celebrations in India and Nepal, due to their geographical proximity to China, have often taken on the character of political rallies, while those at more distant locations tend to emphasize the Dalai Lama's spiritual leadership.



The exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, has maintained a vigilant effort to focus international attention on the plight of his country, which was annexed by China in 1950. On his birthday, Tibetan Buddhists celebrate his career and leadership. (Shutterstock)

Ritual gatherings will include meditation, chanting, music featuring uniquely Tibetan instruments and songs, and speech offering homage to him. Prayers for his long life and his eventual return to Tibet are always featured.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Losar; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; Sakya Dawa Festival; World Peace Ceremony.

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Danavira Mela (December 22)

Danavira Mela is a winter season holiday advocated by the followers of Avatar Adi Da Samraj (born Franklin Jones, 1939–2008), a onetime disciple of Hindu Swami Muktananda (1908–1982), who later founded his own spiritual organization called Adidam. Over the years of his teaching activity, Adi Da advocated the development of the December celebratory season, traditionally marked in North America by the celebration of Christmas and Hanukkah, with a collective celebration that could potentially include everyone around the globe, a celebration of a season of “Light-in-Everybody.” He saw the winter holidays as essentially about acknowledging the characteristic of “Light” in every person. Thus, the winter holiday becomes focused on love rather than its opposite. It also has seemed appropriate to juxtapose the idea of the time of the year, at least in the Northern Hemisphere, when daylight is in its shortest supply, with the emphasis on the spiritual light shining in each individual.

The new holiday also solve an immediate problem for non-Christians living in the predominantly Christian West, where Christmas is a pervasive presence. It allows

non-Christians to celebrate in a way that resonates with much of the content of Christmas, especially the gift-giving aspect.

For the followers of Adi Da, while attempting to universalize the winter holidays, Danavira Mela is uniquely the celebration of their guru as the hero of giving. It is one holiday in a three-month holiday cycle that begins with the celebration of Adi Da's receiving citizenship from Fiji on October 23; continues through his birthday on November 3, and New Year's Day; and finally culminating on January 11, commemorated as the anniversary of the Initiation of Avatar Adi Da's Divine Avataric Self-Emergence. This holiday cycle is then integrated into what disciples see as a complete way to live in relationship to their guru, which they term "the Reality-Way of Adidam."

For Adi Da's disciples, Danavira Mela is a time when for gift making, gift giving, and retelling stories of their guru's life and their interaction with him.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Avatar Adi Da Samraj's Birthday; Christmas; Hanukkah; HumanLight; Kumbha Mela.

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Daruma Kuyo (February 3)

Daruma are good-luck dolls made of paper, usually red in color, that may be found in both Shinto and Buddhist settings throughout Japan. The dolls are named for the founder of Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma, also known as Daruna. It was said of him, that following years of sitting motionless in meditation, his arms and legs atrophied, shriveled up, and fell off. The Daruma dolls have no arms or legs. People will commonly purchase them on the traditional Japanese New Year's Day, Koshogatsu (mid-January), or the traditional New Year's Day (which was February–March on the Common Era calendar) that was celebrated before Japan accepted the Western calendar in 1872.

The eyes drawn on the daruma doll are simple white ovals. When the doll's owner makes a wish for the coming year, he or she will take traditional brush and ink and paint one eye black. When the wish is actualized, the other eye is painted. Generally, a daruma doll is kept for only one year and then returned to the temple or shrine and burned. Many temples and shrines set days early in the year at which all the Daruma dolls are burned or sent out in a boat to be consumed in the water. Some dolls are rubbed on the body and blown upon to absorb any negativities from the owner before being burned or sent out into the river or ocean. This ritual consuming of the dolls is called Daruma kuyo.

One temple famous for the daruma kuyo ceremony it holds annually, on February 3, is Nishi-Arai Daishi, a ninth-century Shingon temple in Tokyo. Members of the temple

bring their Daruma figures to be placed in the temple's garden area to be burnt together. The ceremony begins with the entrance of the officiating Buddhist monks dressed in the style of a mountain priest and blowing a conch-shell horn. They are followed by a line of monks in their normal habits. They will gather around the thousands of Daruma figures and light them as a sutra (a Buddhist holy book) is read aloud.

Following the Daruma kuyo ceremony, the monks lead a bean-throwing ceremony to signal the end of winter and the coming of spring.

Horin-ji (a.k.a. Daruma-dera), a Shingon temple in Kyoto, is also famous for its participation in the use of the Daruma dolls. It has a large collection of them on display.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Doll Festival.

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Darwin Day (February 12)

Charles Robert Darwin, whose theories concerning biological evolution would work a revolution in Protestant thought, was born February 12, 1809, at Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England. As a youth, he was sent by his physician father to Shrewsbury Grammar School, run by Rev. Samuel Butler and reflective of the family's Church of England background. Due to his poor performance, in 1825, young Charles was taken out of school. He gradually gave up on medicine as a career. Thus, in 1827, his father arranged for him to attend Christ's College, Cambridge University, to prepare for the clergy. However, Darwin did not take to theological studies, though he did meet Rev. John Stevens Henslow (1796–1821), who taught botany and significantly influenced Darwin's choice of biology as a career. By 1830, he decided to become a clergyman living in a rural area where he could pursue his interest in nature. The next year, he passed his final exams.

Before Darwin settled down, however, Rev. Henslow arranged for him to travel as a naturalist aboard the HMS *Beagle* on a two-year survey voyage of South America. The voyage took him along the South American coast, to the Falkland Islands, and finally to the Galapagos. In each place, he collected specimens of living plants and animals and fossil forms as he ran across them. He spent the better part of two months (September–October 1835) on several of the Galapagos Islands. Here, amid the new species, he would make the key observations that would lead to his

breakthrough books. The ship returned to England in October 1836, having stopped in New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

Back in England, his ruminations on all he had observed and learned led to doubts about the commonly held idea that new species had originated from a series of individual miraculous creations by the deity, and he began to question the popular arguments for the existence of God of William Paley (1743–1805), which he had absorbed at Cambridge, based upon the design seen in nature. He gathered and published his findings from the voyage and pursued speculations through correspondence with animal breeders. Realizing the heretical nature of his speculations (in both the theological and scientific communities), he delayed publishing them for a number of years. His new wife Emma Wedgwood, whom he wed in 1839, was concerned about his salvation.

By 1842, he had worked out the basics of his understanding of evolution, which he saw following the laws of nature. By this time, Darwin had become a Deist, believing that the laws of nature had been established by God at the time of creation, but that following his creation of the world, God then stepped back and allowed the world to evolve without further divine interference.

Darwin would spend the next 15 years refining his ideas, doing further research and letting a selection of trusted colleagues know where his work was leading. Finally in 1858, at a meeting of the Linnean Society in London, Darwin went public with his ideas on the evolution of species, now motivated by similar ideas being advocated by his colleague (and rival) Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913). His groundbreaking book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, appeared late in 1859. In it, he advocated the idea that new species had evolved over time by means of natural selection. His critics charged that his approach led natural science away from its primary role as an investigator of God's creation.

The book created a controversy, and found church critics from the likes of the learned Anglican bishop Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873) on down. He found primary support from the likes of Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), who began to publish in support of Darwinism (a term he coined). Huxley was probably the most effective in advancing the evolution hypothesis among scientists and in his 1863 book, *Evidence on Man's Place in Nature*, he broached the notion that humans were related to apes. Philosopher Herbert Spencer would coin the term “survival of the fittest” to replace natural selection.

In 1871, Darwin's more blatant statement of where his theories were leading appeared in *The Descent of Man*. By this time, the debate over evolution had found support from a majority (though by no means unanimous) consensus of the scientific community, and the more educated readers had already perceived where the idea of evolution was leading. Though *The Descent of Man* did not stir the public debate in England that the *Origin of the Species* did, it did, in the eyes of many church leaders, especially in the United States, draw a line across which they could not move.

Darwin continued to write, his *Autobiography* appearing in 1876, and numerous studies supportive of his theories appeared as technical monographs. However, heart

problems manifested in 1881, and he passed away on April 19, 1882. He was buried at Westminster Abbey.

Darwin died an honored scientist in his own land, but had become a most controversial figure in North America. Acceptance of evolution (even as married to a form of theism) would be seen as a sign of modernism and departure from the literal interpretation of the Bible. Arguments over evolution, especially the inclusion of humankind in that process, would become heated through the first decades of the 20th century and reach an initial culmination in the so-called Monkey Trial held in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, where creationism was opposed to popular versions of evolutionary thought. Through the 1920s, American Protestantism would begin to split into two communities: the Fundamentalists (who opposed evolution) and the Modernists (who supported it). The latter groups would gain control of most of the larger denominations and the leading seminaries. Fundamentalism would evolve over the rest of the century and develop a spectrum of views on creation, including various attempts to build scientific support for a literal reading of the opening chapters of Genesis.

In 1993, Dr. Robert Stephens, a Humanist in the San Francisco Bay Area, began to motivate members of the Humanist Community of Palo Alto, California, to support an annual Darwin Day event. The first event toward such a celebration was a public lecture by paleoanthropologist Donald Johanson, who had discovered the early hominid named “Lucy,” one of the more important skeletons used to document human evolution. The lecture occurred on April 22, 1995, under the cosponsorship of the Humanist Community and the Stanford Humanists student group. Subsequently, the Humanist Community held a Darwin Day event every year on February 12.

The celebration of Darwin Day caught on quickly among Unbelief organizations in the United States, and support was soon officially given by the Council for Secular Humanism and the associated Center for Inquiry and Campus Freethought Alliance, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, and the American Humanist Association. Internationally, it was backed by the British Humanist Association, the Alliance for Secular Humanist Societies, and the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Freethought Day; National Day of Reason.

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Dasain

Dasain is the largest annual festival among the Hindu community of Nepal. It is a national holiday in both Nepal and Bhutan and widely celebrated in the neighboring states of India, especially Sikkim and West Bengal. A two-week festival to the Mother Goddess(es), it occurs in the same month as the celebration of the Navaratri (the Durga Puja) across much of India and the Kali Puja most observed in Bengal. Dasain is celebrated during the waning moon (between full and new moon) during the Indian month of Ashwin, or the month of Kartik on the Nepalese calendar (September–October on the Common Era calendar). Observant families will prepare for the festival by cleaning the house and setting up the Ghatasthapana, a room in their home which will become a place for worship for the next two weeks.

The festival, which draws heavily on Hindu Tantra themes, is centered on the worship two sets of female deities, the *Astha-Matrikas* and the *Nava Durgas*. Astha-Matrikas (eight mothers) are a set of tantric deities generally always grouped together and thought of as assisting the Devi as she fights demons. Devi can be thought of as synonymous with shakti, the female aspect of the divine, and hence the core essence of every Hindu goddess. In the Shaktaite forms of Hinduism (as opposed to the larger Saivite and Vaishnava tradition) Devi (or one of the other prominent mother goddesses such as Durga or Kali) is the primary deity. In Vaishnava and Shaivite traditions, she is seen as the energy that gives the god life and power. The consorts of Vishnu and Shiva are also identified with Devi.

Navadurga (the nine Durgas), represent the manifestation of the goddess Durga in nine different forms. Hindus across India will worship Durga and her nine forms during Navratri (the Nine Divine Nights, commonly called Durga Puja) which occurs just prior to the full moon when the Dasain festival begins.

The specific story that gave rise to the Dasain festival is from the *Ramayana*, in which Rams victory over Ravana, the fiendish king of demons, is told in some detail. For Shaktaite Hindus, the emphasis of the story is the fact that Rama did not attain success until he evoked the goddess Durga, who slew the demon Mahisasur. The first nine days of Dasain recall the nine days of the battle between Durga and Mahisasur. She actually slew him on the 10th day, and the next 5 days celebrate her victory.



A statue of the Hindu goddess Durga in Jabalpur, India. Durga is worshipped during many festivals, but particularly in Nepal during Dasain. (Dr. Sandeep Jain/Dreamstime)

On the first day of Dasain, a pot is placed in the room set aside for worship in a sandbox, and holy water is poured in it. Cow dung is added and barley seeds planted in the pot and the sandbox. At an astrologically set moment, the priest or senior male in the family will invoke the presence of Durga. During the next two weeks, the married women in the family will say the Durga mantras and guard the images of the goddesses, but only males will go into the room with the pot and its seeds for twice-daily worship.

The twice-daily rituals are the main focus of observance during the first week of Dasain, but on the seventh day, called Fulpati, the sprouts of the recently planted barley seeds, called *jamara*, which will be used by the Nepalese royal household, arrive in the capital after a three-day march from Gorkha, the family's ancestral home, and are paraded in front of the royal palace, where government officials will gather.

One the evening of the eighth day, after a time of fasting during the daylight hours, the most controversial aspect of the festival occurs. Termed the dark night, in the many temples dedicated to Durga (and many other locations) thousands of animals—goats, sheep, buffaloes—are sacrificed. Simultaneously, the majority of the people will be dining at feasts notable for the meat consumed. (Many vegetarian Hindus have mobilized to protest this aspect of the Dasain celebration.) On the ninth day, the temple at the royal palace is opened for the public to enter (the only day in the year they are allowed to come inside). Also, during this day, the official army sacrifices (of buffalos) are held, and many gather to witness the ritual.

The Dasain festival reaches a climactic phase on the 10th day, when the jar of sprouts are taken from the worship room and the elders give them to the younger family members. Along with the *jamara*, each person receives a holy mark on their forehead called a *tika*. Usually, extended families will gather for this event. The Nepalese ruler will receive a *tika* from one of the priests who serve at the palace, and will in turn give a *tika* to many of his people who visit him this day.

The last days of the festival are primarily for visiting with one's extended family and enjoying the festive atmosphere. On the last day, the day of the new moon, the people stay home to rest from the hectic schedule they have been following and to give attention to another female deity, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Ambuvachi; Navaratri; Teej Festivals.

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Daslakshan Parva. See Paryushana

Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary (February 26)

Data Ganj Bakhsh (c. 990–c. 1063), popular name of Abul Hassan Ali Ibn Usman al-Jullabi al-Hajvery al-Ghaznawi, was a Persian Sufi scholar who is credited with helping the spread of Islam through South Asia. He adhered to the to the Junaidia school of Sufism, which led him to settle in Iraq near the order's leader Junaid Bagdadi (830–910 CE). While living there, he found himself taken captive and resettled to Lahore (now Pakistan). He would spend the rest of his life in Lahore. In his major work, *The Kashf Al Mahjub*, he dealt with the Sufi concept of the annihilation of the self due to the merging with God. He searched for metaphors that allowed him to speak of acquiring divine qualities without losing one's individual personality. He also championed the idea of Sufis' observing of the laws of Islam (the Shariah) along with their focus on the devotional life

After his death, Data Ganj Bakhsh's body was honored with placement in a fine mausoleum in Lahore, which became a pilgrimage site. He was remembered as a great saint, and annually on the anniversary of his death, people gathered as a memorial. As

the observance of the memorial evolved over the centuries, it has become a three-day celebration in which people come and go to the mausoleum where they pay their respects by reciting verses from the Qur'an, or poetry. The festival is initiated with city officials laying a *chaddar* (a garment usually used to veil women) at the tomb and to distribute milk and food to those in attendance. The distribution of milk harks back to the day when taxes were paid in milk. According to local legend, Data Gunj Bakhsh stopped this practice, which led to a general economic betterment of the city, and his followers began to give him milk to give to those in need.

Times are arranged for men and women to visit the shrine at separate times in keeping with the general rules in Islamic societies about men mingling with females outside of their family.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ashura; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Dattatreya Jayanti

Dattatreya Jayanti is a name under which many Hindu women celebrate Magha Purnima, the full moon day of the Indian Hindu month of Marga (December–January on the Common Era calendar). The observance derived from a story of Anusuya, the wife of one of the fabled ancient Seven Sages, Atri Maharishi.

Anusuya was a model of chastity and devotion, and a practitioner Pativrata Dharma, which emphasized devotion to one's husband to the point of seeing him as God himself. She engaged in austerities in order to bare him sons equal to the primary Hindu deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

As the stories go, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati (the wives of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, respectively) asked their husbands to test Anusuya by presenting offering to them while unclothed. They donned the saffron robes of a sannyasin (a renunciate) and passed along the request, which placed Anusuya in a highly conflicted situation as the request violated her own disciplines that prevented her from appearing nude before anyone but her husband. She solved her dilemma by meditating on her husband and the homage she paid at his feet. She then took water used for washing his

feet and sprinkled a few drops on the three sannyasins. The three deities were transformed into babies. She subsequently breast-fed the babies. When she presented them to her husband, he already understood what had occurred, he embraced the three babies and they became one.

Meanwhile, the three divine wives became aware of what had occurred, and they assumed human form to request the return of their husbands. As Atri bowed before the goddesses to honor their request, the three husband deities also appeared. The child would now remain with Anusuya and grow up to become a sage equal to the gods. His name would be Dattatreya, a man of wisdom around whom a number of supernatural stories would adhere. The *Avadhuta Gita* is a volume that details his path to realization and the truths he taught. He is recorded as saying, “The Self alone is my Guru. Yet, I have learnt wisdom from twenty-four other individuals and objects. So they, too, are also my Gurus.” The other gurus (teachers) were nature and its inhabitants such as the sun, bears, the elephant, and the spider. He noted, for example, “The python does not move about for its food. It remains contented with whatever it gets, lying in one place. From this I learnt to be unmindful of food and to be contented with whatever I get to eat.”

Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963), founder of the Divine Life Society, noted that at his ashram in Rishikish, that Dattatreya Jayanti is celebrated annually with worship at the Dattatreya Temple on a hill near the ashram at which ashram residents bathe the statue and decorate it with flowers and sing hymns and listen to discourses of Dattatreya’s teachings. Sivananda advises aspirants to use the day for fasting and meditation and the reading of the *Avadhuta Gita*.

One popular belief in India is that a deceased and sinful person may be helped across the Vaitarani River, the Hindu river that serves as a barrier to the land of the dead, by descendants chanting “*Shree Gurudev Datta*,” a mantra calling upon Dattatreya.

Constance A. Jones

See also Magha Purnima.

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Day of All Things

The Day of All Things is a holy day of the Unification Church, the Korean new religious movement founded by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920) in 1954. The Day of All Things itself was established on May 1, 1963, using the lunar calendar. Most

Unification holy days have been celebrated using the Korean calendar, and in 2010, Moon ruled that all holy days would follow that calendar. The Korean lunar calendar is similar to the traditional Chinese calendar.

The Day of All Things was the third holy day established by Moon, following the creation of Parents Day and Children's Day in 1960, the year that Moon married Hak Ja Han. Unificationists are taught that the Day of All Things celebrates God's desire to restore the environment and the pivotal role of Sun Myung Moon in that process.

Unification members view Sun Myung Moon as True Father and his wife as True Mother. Together, they are the True Parents for fallen humanity and a fallen environment. Moon cites biblical material to back his claim that the Earth is itself longing for restoration.

As with other holy days, Unificationists celebrate the Day of All Things by honoring True Parents. In addition to traditional food offerings, on the Day of All Things, members are encouraged to give corn, barley, rice, or other foods that represent earthly harvest. Gifts are also offered to True Parents and prayers are offered in their name. Members are also encouraged to arrange parties and special events after official ceremonies are completed.

James A. Beverley

See also Children's Day; Parents Day; True Parents' Birthday; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos). See All Souls Day

Days of Awe

The period known as the Days of Awe and the Ten Days of Repentance in the Jewish calendar usher in a time of reflection and repentance as themes in the Jewish faith. They begin with Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) and end with Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Rosh Hashanah occurs on the 1st day of the month of Tishri and Yom Kippur falls on the 10th day on the same month (September–October on the Common Era calendar).

Jews believe that during these days, God determines their fate for the coming year, even deciding who shall live and who shall die. On Rosh Hashanah, God opens the book of judgment, and on Yom Kippur, the book is closed and sealed. Jewish theology teaches that during the intervening days, when God's judgment remains open, prayer,

repentance, and good deeds may avert a harsh decree. It is thus customary for Jews to convey to one another good wishes for the New Year accompanied by the phrase “may you be inscribed in the Book of Life.”

In modern Jewish communities, the services held during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the best-attended events of the year for the average synagogue. Rabbis will often organize additional gatherings for people who are either not affiliated with a synagogue or are unable to attend their own synagogue. The Sabbath service that falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Shuvah, or the Sabbath of Return.

On the day before Yom Kippur, termed Erev Yom Kippur (or the “eve of Day of Atonement”) believers will mark the time with a meal before the fast, acts of charity, and requesting (and granting) forgiveness of others. Yom Kippur is a most solemn and focused occasion that includes five services at the synagogue and 25 hours of fasting, emphasizing the means of finding atonement in a world in which no temple in Jerusalem stands.

Generally, to accommodate the many who wish to participate in the High Holy Days, synagogues require reservations and will admit people only with the presentation of a “ticket” verifying their reservation. Most synagogues expect a donation in return for the ticket. A similar requirement accompanies the various independent High Holy Day services established to meet the needs of the otherwise unaffiliated. Both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are official holidays in Israel, but not the Days of Awe between them.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur.

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Death of Jean-François Lefevre de la Barre (July 1)

Jean-François Lefevre de la Barre (1745–1766) was a young man who was executed in Abbeville, France, for blasphemy, a case that began with the vandalism of a crucifix. Following the vandalism incident, the local authorities conducted an investigation that

led them to la Barre, a nobleman, and several companions. While no evidence ever connected him and the other young men to the vandalism, they were finally accused of a variety of other impious and blasphemous actions. On July 1, 1766, la Barre was executed by beheading and his body burnt.

Among the items found in searching la Barre's living quarters was a copy of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*. This item was subsequently used to condemn Voltaire as the cause of la Barre's going astray. Voltaire was initially upset by the attention the case brought to him. Even the National Assembly reviewed the sentence. However, he quickly wrote an account of the incident defending la Barre (and himself) and condemning the prosecutors. He would a decade later write a second account, the main sources of current knowledge of the incident, and make it a public issue in Paris. Finally, a century later, the National Convention convening during the French Revolution reversed the Abbeville court's decision.

In the decades since the action of the National Convention, with the rise of Freethought to a powerful position in France, the execution of la Barre became a day to remember and a time to denounce blasphemy laws and to call attention to all who suffer persecution from their dissent of religious establishments and religiously based regimes. Its primary celebration remains largely limited to France.

In 1905, a statue of la Barre was erected in the Montmartre section of Paris (not far from the prominent Sacré-Coeur church). It was moved to a more remote location in 1926 following complaints by Catholic believers, and in 1941, shortly after France entered World War II, it was melted down for its metal. Its original base remained, and in 2001, a new statue with appropriate ceremonies was erected on the site.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Freethought Day; National Day of Reason.

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Devathani Ekadashi. See Kartika Snan

Dhan Teras

Dhan Teras celebrates the birthday of Dhanvantari, one of the incarnations of the deity Vishnu. In the accounts of him in the ancient Hindu texts the Vedas and the later

Puranas, he appears as the physician of the gods (or devas), and is pictured as the originator of the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

Dhanvantari is usually depicted with four hands. In one hand, he holds various medical herbs, and in another, he holds a pot filled with the elixir called *amrita*. In one incident during the famous story of the churning of the ocean of milk by the devas and asuras (demons), he emerged out of the ocean carrying the pot of *amrita*. The asuras took the *amrita*, which had to be retrieved by Mohini, the only female incarnation of Vishnu.

The celebration of Dhan Teras is focused in the contemporary Ayurveda community, but is no less enthusiastic for the limited numbers who observe it. Dhan Teras occurs on the 13th day of the waning half of the moon during the Hindu month of Ashwin (October–November on the Common Era calendar), just two days before the start of Diwali.

Those who observe the day will rise early, take a ritual bath, put on new clothes and spend the day in a fast. The fast is broken in the evening, an event noted by the lighting of a lamp before one's front door. Some will purchase new cooking utensils on this day.

Constance A. Jones

See also Diwali; Janmashtami.

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Dhyanyogi's Mahasamadhi (August 29)

Shri Dhyanyogi Madhusudandas, who founded a set of Hindu religious centers in India and around the world, was born in 1878. He left home as a child of 13 and began to wander around India studying yoga with various teachers. After some three decades of wandering, he met kundalini-master Shri Yogiraj Parameshwardas at Mount Abu in Rajasthan state in western India. Parameshwardas gave him the Shaktipat initiation, which is said to cause the rising of the kundalini energy resting latent at the base of the spine. As a result, Dhyanyogi experienced samadhi (a high mystical state) and attained God realization, in which state he remained for three days. He subsequently became a master of kundalini maha yoga, with the ability to offer shaktipat initiations to others.

He settled in Bandhwad, Gujarat, where he carried on his work and teachings. In 1960, he began to conduct group meditation programs throughout India, and in 1976, he came to the United States, where he spent four years teaching, initiating people into kundalini yoga, and establishing centers. He returned to India in 1980 and

spent his remaining years in residence in Ahmedabad, India. He died on August 29, 1994, the anniversary of Lord Krishna's birth.

His disciples, now under the guidance of his spiritual heir, Shri Anandi Ma, gather annually at the end of August for a retreat in commemoration of Shri Dhyanyogi's Mahasamadhi. Shiva was the main deity acknowledged in the Dhyanyoga movement, and a Shiva Puja (worship) is the main activity of the retreat each year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Muktananda, Birthday of Swami Paramahansa.

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Dianetics, Anniversary of (May 9)

Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health is the basic textbook of the Church of Scientology. It was written by church founder L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) and culminated a lifetime of consideration of the human condition, especially how the misunderstanding of the mind allowed mental aberrations to multiply and be perpetuated, thus leading to the spectrum of human dysfunctionality. Released in 1950, *Dianetics* would become the basis for further ruminations that focused on the human spirit (which Hubbard called the Thetan) and resulted in the development of Scientology and the church as the vehicle for spreading it. Even though Scientology largely supersedes the perspectives presented in *Dianetics*, the path to becoming an accomplished Scientologist, called an Operating Thetan, still begins with *Dianetics*, and the church has made every effort to translate the book into multiple languages and disseminate it worldwide.

The continuing effort to disseminate *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* is focused annually on May 9, the anniversary of its original release in 1950. Shortly prior to that date each year, a large gathering is held at the International Flag Land Base (where the higher levels of Scientology teachings are presented to members), considered the spiritual headquarters of the church, located in Clearwater, Florida. This gathering features international leaders of the church and prominent leaders from the secular world who are friends of the church speaking on the contributions of *Dianetics* to human progress and church members offering testimonies of the miraculous events that have come from applying *Dianetics*/Scientology in their life.

The event in Clearwater is recorded, duplicated, and disseminated to all of the local Scientology churches around the world, each of which organizes a

Dianetics Anniversary event about a week after the Clearwater event to which members of the church are invited and at which the DVD of the Clearwater event is shared.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Divine Holy Spirit Festival

The Divine Holy Spirit Festival is a weeklong celebration that appropriately begins on Pentecost Sunday and lasts through the following Sunday. Found throughout the Portuguese-speaking world, its origins are traced to the medieval queen Isabel of Portugal (1271–1336, also known as Saint Elizabeth of Portugal). She was the daughter of Pedro III, king of Aragon (1239–1285), and raised in a pious environment, which she integrated into her young life. Still, in her teen years, she was married to the king of Portugal, who turned out to be a secular man of questionable morals. Isabel is remembered for accepting her fate and spending much of her life attempting to win her husband to the faith he professed and reforming his character. She quietly pursued the regular religious practices of her youth.

She was devoted to the poor and needy, and in 1309, on their behalf, she had a small church, the Chapel of Saint Vincent, built at Obidos (a town traditionally under the hegemony of the queens of Portugal). At Obidos, she also led in the founding of a new Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, organized as a lay fraternity to care for the ill. Near the church, she located a house for the care of lepers.

She finally won over her husband, and then after he died in 1325, she retired to a convent of Poor Clares as a Franciscan Tertiary habit. She died there, and over the next century, many miracles were attributed to her. Urban VIII (r. 1623–1644) canonized her in 1625. Her feast day is July 8.

At one point in her reign, a famine hit Portugal. Isabel made herself quite visible in praying for the relief from the famine. On the behalf of the hungry, she donated her crown as a votive offering to the Holy Spirit, as she prayed for the end of the famine. She then initiated the tradition of feeding the poor on Pentecost. The tradition caught on, and over the centuries, female members of the royalty have arisen to further emphasize her example. To this day, in Portugal and its former colonies (the Azores, Brazil), churches display large replicas of the queen's crown and coordinate efforts to distribute food and wine as an integral part of the festivities of the week following Pentecost.

The festive week will culminate in events organized by the still-very-active Holy Spirit Brotherhood chapters. Friday is a day for a special Mass followed by

processions, often with the replicas of Isabel's crown prominently displayed. Food will include special sweetbreads, wine, and a traditional but simple soup, *Sopa do Espirito Santo*, made from meat and cabbage in a thin broth. In places, the festivities will conclude with fireworks on Sunday evening. In Brazil, the festival is often celebrated during the days between Ascension Sunday and Pentecost.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ascension Day; Fiesta dos Tabuleiros; Pentecost.

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Divine Mercy Sunday

Divine Mercy Sunday is a recent designation (2000) of the Sunday after Easter within the Roman Catholic Church. It derives from the visions and writings of Helena Kowalska (1905–1938), a Polish nun known to her fellow nuns as Sister Maria Faustina of the Most Blessed Sacrament. She had a set of visions of Christ in which the conversations related to his merciful love of humanity. Her confessor requested that she keep a written record of her experiences, a key incident occurring in 1931 when Jesus requested that an image of himself be made as he appeared to her for the veneration of the faithful. The image that was later produced showed rays of light emanating from his heart, one clear like water and the other red like blood. The veneration of the image initially occurred in her convent, from which it spread. Accompanying the veneration was a chaplet (a small string of beads analogous to a rosary), which was to be used in saying the prayers accompanying the veneration of the Divine Mercy picture.

After World War II, her diary of visionary experiences was published, and the devotion to Divine Mercy began to spread through Catholic circles. Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963) placed her works on the index of forbidden books, but a different view began to rise. Karol Wojtyła (the future Pope John Paul II), was elected archbishop of Kraków, in Poland. He opened an investigation into the life and work of Saint Faustina. He brought his awareness of her to Rome when he became the pope in 1978. His favorable appraisal of her work led to her beatification in 1993 and canonization on the Sunday after Easter (April 30) in 2000. In his talk at the canonization ceremony, he designated the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday throughout the church. While in effect placing the church's seal of approval on the visions, he offered a justification for the new emphasis by noting that the revelations did not in fact do anything but emphasize what was already affirmed by the church.

Not lost on those devoted to the picture of Divine Mercy was the Mass for the repose of John Paul II in 2005, which was held on the Sunday after Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Feast of the; Sacred Heart of Jesus; Feast of the.

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Divino Rostro, Devotion to (September)

Naga City, the capital of the province of Camarines Sur, the Philippines, is the home to the largest religious gathering in the country, the annual Feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, focused on an 18th-century miraculous statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is housed in Our Lady of Peñafrancia Basilica in Naga City. Also residing at the basilica and now an integral element in the devotion that is manifest there, especially for the feast every September, is a second miraculous object, a cloth image of Jesus based on the idea of the veil of Veronica. The idea of the veil is based on a story that arose in medieval Europe that a woman named Veronica met Jesus as he carried the cross from his place of imprisonment to his place of crucifixion on Calvary (a route called the Via Dolorosa, or way of suffering). She wiped the sweat from his face, and an image of him was transferred to the cloth. This event, not mentioned in the New Testament, found its way to stations of the cross, the devotional images of Jesus's last days now found in every Roman Catholic Church. Veronica is the name given to the unnamed woman the woman who was healed by Jesus when she touched the hem of his garment (Luke 8:43–48) in the later apocryphal work, the *Acts of Pilate*.

In the early 19th century, a couple in Osa de la Vega, Spain, possessed an image of Jesus's Face (Divino Rostro), an item for personal devotion of no particular sanctity. At one point, however, the image was seen to sweat blood. The phenomenon became news in the town and soon spread throughout the region. People gathered at the couple's home to view the miraculous object. They donated it to the local church.

At several times in the middle of the century, cholera epidemics spread through the region. During the waves of cholera (in 1834, 1855, and 1865), Osa de la Vega did not witness any deaths, a fact that many attributed to the Divino Rostro. During this time, devotion to the Divine Rostro became firmly established.

In the late 19th century, one Father Pedro de la Torre became the new vicar general of the Diocese of Nueva Caceres, settled in Naga, held a copy of the Divino Rostro of Osa de la Vega, and allowed it to be placed on view for the veneration of the local populous. Over time, its popularity grew. Then in 1882, a cholera epidemic began to spread from Manila to Naga, and many died.

The bishop of Naga, Msgr. Casimiro Herrera, brought the statue of Our Lady of Peñafrancia to the cathedral and services were held asking her protection from the otherwise-incurable disease. Fr. de la Torre recalled the earlier connection between cholera and the image from Osa de la Vega, and began to tell people about how the town was preserved from the ravages of the disease. The copy of the Divino Rostro was brought to the cathedral and placed beside the image of the Virgin.

As the two images were venerated, Bishop Herrera made a promise that should the epidemic leave, the Divino Rostro would be henceforth venerated along with the Virgin of Penafrancia at the annual celebration each September. Within 24 hours, the effects of the disease noticeably decreased. Within a few days, the cholera disappeared. True to the bishop's promise, beginning in September 1883, the Divino Rostro was included in the processions of Our Lady of Penafrancia from its shrine to the cathedral and back.

Fr. de la Torre donated the Divino Rostro to the shrine so it could always be available for veneration, and a special altar was constructed for it. Over time, the wooden frame enclosing the image deteriorated and it was replaced with a new one made of silver.

Veneration of the Divino Rostro is focused with a novena (nine-part prayer) each second Friday in the month. The annual festival of Our Lady of Penafrancia begins on the second Friday of September with special services built around the Divino Rostro.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Divino Rostro; Devotion to; Peace and Good Voyage, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Diwali

Diwali (or Divali), the Festival of Lights, is the major Hindu festival of the year. It has become a national festival simultaneously celebrated by Jains, Sikhs, and even the Buddhists, each community pouring its own meaning into it. It lasts for five days, but centers on the new moon day (the darkest day of each month) that

ends the lunar month of Ashwin and begins the month of Kartika. It falls in the last half of October or the first half of November on the Common Era calendar. As a Festival of Lights, it properly occurs during the darkest period of the monthly lunar cycle and become a time to light to community with candles and lanterns.

Diwali seems to have evolved out of ancient but distinct harvest festivals, and many variations in celebration occur across India, reflective of the different local roots. There are also several stories that inform the celebration of Diwali. As with several other Hindu holidays, the story of the gods churning the ocean of milk is retold during Diwali. The story begins with the devtas, or demigods, complaining of weakness from a curse that had been placed on them. The deity Brahma told them that they needed to drink some *amrit*, the nectar of immortality, which could be obtained by the churning of the ocean. Vishnu suggested using Mount Meru as a stick to move the water and took the form of Kurma the giant tortoise, whose back supported the churning stick. The devtas were assisted by the asuras (demons) in the churning activity, which was so successful that the turbulent ocean threatened to become a destructive force, and Vishnu was forced to take action to calm it.

Important for the celebration of Diwali, the churning of the ocean led to the emergence of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth. Lakshmi is the major deity invoked throughout all the various ceremonies performed during Diwali. Also emerging from the ocean was Lord Dhanvantari, who brought with him the knowledge of Ayurvedic medicine, the traditional healing system of India.

Possibly even more popular than the story of the churning of the ocean, is the account of Rama and Sita, incarnations of the deities Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi. Rama was the fabled king of Ayodhya. At one point, he was forced to leave home, and he spent many years in exile. Sita joined him in exile, during which she was abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka. Upon learning of his wife's fate at the hands of his old enemy, Rama defeated Ravana in battle. In one form of the story, Sita had to be tested by fire, in order to prove her chastity while in captivity. One text of the *Ramayana* tells of Sita walking on the fire and the coals turning to lotuses. In southern India, this account is tied to the practice of walking on live coals. By all accounts of the pair, the royal capital suffered greatly in their absence. Upon their return to Ayodhya, the citizens lit lanterns to welcome their ruler and express their delight with his return. The city revived and again became prosperous.

Though it is not New Year's Day in India, many see Diwali as the time to make new beginnings. Homes are prepared by internal cleaning and the painting of outside walls. White is the preferred color as it better reflects the light. In recognition of Lakshmi, stores will hold sales, and shoppers will look for bargains. Preparation and preliminary celebrations may begin as early as Vijayadashami, the last days of the Navaratri festival, which occurs several weeks earlier in the lunar month of Ashwin. Vijayadashami commemorates for many the anniversary of Rama's defeat of Ravana. In northern India, it is also a prominent date for worshippers of Durga.



A Hindu woman prepares traditional oil wick lamps for the celebration of Diwali. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

Each of the five days of Diwali has an additional story and deity to be emphasized, and there are many regional variations throughout India. Ritual days begin with the prior evening, and the first day commences with an offering of prasad (sweets) to Lord Yama (the lord of death). Believers pray for protection from an untimely death. The offering and prayer are made ideally near a sacred tree or, in the absence of an appropriate tree, in a clear space in one's front yard. After these rather solemn acts, lamps are lit and feasting begins. The next morning, attention turns to the goddess Lakshmi,

and each family conduct prayers in which prosperity is a central theme. In Bengal, this day is given over to the dark goddess Kali, goddess of war, who is highly revered in eastern India. Celebration will last into the evening with lights turned on and fireworks discharged. (In Trinidad, firecrackers are made from freshly cut bamboo.)

This first day of Diwali has taken on added significance throughout India as it has traditionally marked the beginning of a new financial year (though increasingly, the market is reordering itself around the Western New Year according to the Common Era calendar. A minor holiday, Dhan Teres (Wealth-Thirteenth) is recognized. It is celebrated as a particularly auspicious day to purchase precious metals. Meanwhile, many businesses celebrate Diwali, and many employees hope for Diwali bonuses and/or gifts. Throughout India, where Diwali is a national holiday, temples to Lakshmi, Durga, and Kali will be filled, though attention to Lakshmi predominates. It is a time to consume many sweets.

Diwali is primarily a Hindu celebration, but Jains join the holiday festivities which coincide with the date generally accepted as the anniversary of the attainment of nirvana (death) of Mahavira, the 24th and last of the last of the Tirthankaras, the holy ones who founded Jainism.

For Sikhs, Diwali dates to the career of Guru Har Gobind Ji (1595–1644), the sixth Sikh Guru. At one point, he was imprisoned along with 56 other kings (all Hindus) at Fort Gwalior by the Islamic emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). After freeing himself and the other prisoners, Gobind Ji went to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The Sikh community welcomed him by lighting candles and divas. Thus, Sikhs will celebrate Diwali as “Bandi Chhorh Divas,” the day of the detainee's release.

In Nepal, the only Hindu kingdom in the world, Diwali is also a major festival called Tihar, with its own national variations, though also centered on Lakshmi. Here, the Buddhists, the primary minority, also participate heartily in the celebration.

Constance A. Jones

See also Calendars, Religious; Common Era Calendar; Dhan Teras; Diwali (Jain); Navaratri; New Year's Day (India).

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Diwali (Jain)

Diwali is the most observed holiday in India. It is especially important for Hindus, but other communities have developed parallel celebrations, just as different groups in North America celebrate the Christmas season, though pouring widely variant content. Diwali is possibly the most holy time for the Jain community, with the exception of the annual Paryusana observance. Diwali marks the anniversary of their founder's final *moksha* (salvation). Mahavira completed his earthly life on this day, most believe in 527 BC. On that same day, his chief follower, Gautama Indrabhuti, also passed away. As the Jain community had developed, Mahavira had selected 11 leaders called ganadharas to head it. Of the 11, 9 finished their early life before Mahavira, and Gautama Indrabhuti was next in line to succeed Mahavira.

Diwali is a five-day festival that begins in the Hindu month of Ashvina and ends in the month of Kartika (usually in November on the Common Era calendar). The Jain celebration falls on the last day of the month of Ashvina, also considered by many to be the end of the Hindu year. The commemoration commences early in the morning of the day, for it was then that Mahavira commenced his last discourse. It lasted through the day until late in the following evening.

Diwali is seen as a festival of lights, and Jain stories tell of 18 rulers from across northern India who present for this final teaching. They decided among them to keep the light of the knowledge Mahavira had imparted by lighting lamps on this day (the time of the new moon when the sky is darkest). Some Jains believe that Diwali was initially a Jain holy day that was later adopted by the Hindu community and developed by them.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Akshay Tritiya; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mauna Agyaras; Mahavir Jayanti; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Doll Festival (March 3)

Just as the Japanese had a day to celebrate their male children, so they had one to celebrate their female offspring. Boy's day had survived as Kodomo ni Hi (Children's Day), while Girl's day (Joshi no Sekku) has become the Doll Festival. On this day, adults will offer prayers for the happiness and prosperity of the female children and pledge themselves to ensure that they grow up healthy and beautiful. The celebration will take place in the home and adjacent to a body of water, the seashore, lakeshore, or river bank. Young girls will dress in a kimono and visit the homes of friends and family.

The name of the day is derived from the Hina-Ningyo, a special kind of stylized dolls which girls collect and display on this day. The display is a tiered platform, the highest level of which is reserved for a doll representing the emperor and his wife. The other dolls represent various couriers, all in traditional dress. In a full display, besides the emperor and empress, there will be three ladies who serve them, as many as 10 musicians, two "guardians" with weapons, and three servants. There will also be tableware to serve the dolls. The festival was given legal sanction in 1687, and initially developed as an event for the wealthy. The small displays of the early years slowly evolved into a full multilevel display, with some 16 dolls and associated doll furniture. In the 20th century, the practice spread to the general population.

A few days before the Doll Festival, girls and their mothers take out the hina and arrange them on a layered structure covered with a red cloth. The emperor and empress will reside on the top, with the other figures displayed on what may be as many as seven steps.

The day of the Doll Festival coincides with a day of purification in the Shinto religion. One practice associated with this day was using dolls of paper as part of a ritual in which one breathed on the dolls and rubbed them on the body, thus transferring any evil to them. The dolls were then thrown into a river or the ocean to be carried away. The Awashima Shrine of Wakayama Prefecture, a shrine particularly used by women, maintains some remnant of this older practice and, on March 3, sends a boat full of dolls out to sea. Some stores sell paper dolls designed to be set afloat, while the large Meiji Shrine provides such dolls made of fish food.



Japanese dolls sit in a display at a shrine during the Japanese Doll Festival. (<http://www.istockphoto.com>)

The Shimogamo Shrine, near Kyoto, sends such dolls out in boats as part of a ceremony designed to promote the safety of children.

Most families have abandoned the purification aspect of the day and see it more as a family-oriented event, one part of which is a meal that will include *hishimochi* (diamond-shaped rice cakes) and *shirozake* (rice malt with sake).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Daruma Kuyo; Kodomo ni Hi; Seijin no Hi; Shichi-Go-San.

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Dol Purnima. See Gaura Purnima; Holi

Dominic, Saint's Day of St. (August 8)

Saint Dominic (1170–1221), visionary, founder of the Dominican Order, and popularizer of the rosary as a devotional tool, was born in Castile, a medieval kingdom in north central Spain. He was trained for the priesthood from his youth, and having mastered theology, he became a canon at the cathedral of the Castilian city

of Osma. Early in his career, he became familiar with the Albigensians (also known as the Cathars), an esoteric religious community that had gained great strength in southern France, especially around the city of Albi. Dominic saw their teachings as rank heresy and accepted a commission to lead a preaching crusade against their teachings, only to discover that the common people were being attracted by the ascetic and moral life being led by the Albigensian leadership.

He rethought his mission and turned to some Cistercian monks (strict Benedictines) and dropped any trappings of the affluent church from which he had come. Over the next decade, he succeeded in winning back many of the Albigensians, though the heretical community remained strong. The experience with dealing with the Albigensians would hold a host of consequences. Those who joined him in the preaching mission gradually came together as a new community that took form in 1215 when Dominic founded the first house of what would become the Dominican Order (also known as the Order of Preachers) that would go on to become one of the largest in the church. The intimate relationship between the founding of the Dominicans and the effort to eliminate the Albigensians coincided with the founding of the Inquisition and the identification of Dominic's order with that institution, though there is no evidence that Dominic was himself ever an inquisitor.

Saint Dominic is also reputed to have had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in which she gave him the rosary and conveyed to him a set of 15 promises to those who regularly said their rosary prayers. While the historicity of Dominic's role in the development of the rosary as a devotional tool has been questioned, there is little doubt that the Dominicans would become the rosary's major advocates through the Middle Ages and are largely responsible for its present popularity.

Dominic lived an active and ascetic life. He chose to live with discomfort and integrated shows of self-denial into his public appearances. These took their toll, and he died at the age of 51, on August 6, 1220. He was canonized in 1234 by Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–1241). He has become the patron saint of the Dominican Republic. His feast day is August 8.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St.

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Dosojin Matsuri

Bridging the gap between New Year's Day (January 1) and Chinese New Year's Day (in February) in Japan are a set of fire festivals, held around the country beginning the second week of the month of January. These festivals originated in common New Year concerns in which individuals seek information on the future, project hopes for improvements in life, or attempt to magically block ill fortune. All of the festivals originated and are still associated with a local Shinto shrine, but all of the larger festivals have been secularized as winter events, associated in the public mind with ski holidays, the drinking of sake, and all-night parties.

The term Dosojin is attached to a set of Shinto deities of roads and borders most often seen while moving around the countryside keeping guard at the edge of villages and in mountain passes. In cities, they can be found at street corners or near bridges. The deities' tasks include the blocking of evil spirits and catastrophes—any evil influences from outside the village. Travelers will pass dosojin statues set along roadways to protect them in their travels, especially on pilgrimages. The dosojin also serve as a deity of marriage and fertility, and women will look to them in hopes of becoming pregnant or, once pregnant, of having an easy childbirth. Thus, amid the celebration of the fire festival, some will have deeper purposes. Children, for example, will be seen throwing their calligraphy into the fire to see if the paper is carried into the air (a sign that they will become proficient in the art).

Possibly the most famous of the fire festivals is the Nozawa Dosojin Himatsurhi held on January 15 at Nozawa Onsen in Nagano Prefecture, its stated purpose being to pray for a coming year of abundance and fortune. This particular festival originated in the declining years of the Shogunate in the 1860s.

The event is built around a 35-foot fire shrine that the villagers construct from trees that were cut down before the winter freeze. The men in the village who are at the unlucky age of 25 or 42 are especially recruited to assist in the soon-to-be-consumed structure. Around the shrine a set of lantern poles are also ritually erected. These are contributed by a village family that has welcomed a new child during the past year.

The festivities begin with the lighting of the fire, and the 25- and 42-year-old men are given the honor. The torch used to start the fire has been lit by striking two stones together. Before the shrine is actually set afire, a mock battle, but with very real struggle, is held between villagers with torches attempting to light the shrine and defenders who protect it. After an hour of battling, the 42-year-olds will end the struggle and light the fire. The shrine is burnt as an offering to the gods.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Chichibu Yomatsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; New Year's Day; Sakura Matsuri.

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Double Ninth Festival

The Double Ninth Festival, also known as Chongyangjie or the Chung Yeung Festival, continues a pattern in Chinese festivals that begins early in the lunar year and places festival on the same day numerically as the month, thus there is a major festival on the first day of the first month (New Year's), the second day of the second month (Spring Dragon); the fifth day of the fifth month (Dragon Boat) and the seventh day of the seventh month (Double Seventh Festival). This pattern both reveals the potency of numbers considered good, with no festivals in the months numbered with negative numbers, and the additional symbolism accruing to different numbers. Nine is a male number associated with the male or yang side of the yin-yang polarity that controls so much of life.

The Double Ninth Festival appears to date back to the Han dynasty (221–206 BCE), at about the same time as the emergence of religious Taoism and its cosmology built around the concepts of yin-yang and the Five Agents—water, fire, metal, wood, and earth.

In the celebration of the festival, two plants come to the fore, the dogwood and chrysanthemum. The dogwood with its strong scent had been both a plant desired for its aesthetic qualities and its medicinal properties (Chinese doctors used it to treat kidney problems). The chrysanthemum is valued both for its beauty and as a substance producing longevity. Thus people came to wear the flowers of both plants and to drink wine (or tea) made from chrysanthemums. The actual festival traces back to a story from the Han dynasty about a mistress of the emperor who was driven from the palace by his wife. She revealed that every year on the ninth day of the ninth month, everyone in the palace wore dogwoods and drank wine to ward off disasters.

Today, as the holiday has become more secular, celebrants have added additional elements to the celebration. The Double Ninth cake, some of which can become very fancy, are stuffed with various fruits or meats, and stacked in nine layers in the shape of a tower. Climbing mountains, also associated with long life, has become a popular activity on this day. The less adventurous can visit local parks to see the flower displays, or follow the example of the long-lived empress Dowager Ci Xi (1835–1908) and add a little chrysanthemum jelly to their diet.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Double Seventh Festival; Dragon Boat Festival; Spring Dragon Festival.

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Double Seventh Festival

The Chinese, like people in many cultures, have interesting beliefs about numbers. Some numbers are considered lucky, and it is also traditional wisdom that good things come in pairs. These various beliefs come together in Chinese holidays, many of which occur on the same numbered day as the month. Thus, the Spring Dragon Festival occurs on the second day of the second lunar month, and the Dragon Boat Festival is on the fifth day of the fifth month. The Double Seventh Festival is named for the fact that it occurs on the seventh day of the seventh month.

This day, the Chinese equivalent of Valentine's Day in the West, is built around the story of two lovers. The first was Niu Ling, an orphaned boy whose only possession was an old ox. Before he died, the aging animal told his owner that annually on the seventh day of the seventh month, the seven daughters of the Jade Emperor, the ruler of heaven in traditional Chinese religion, would descend to earth for a bath in the local river. He advised hiding the clothes of the youngest Zhi Nu, known for her cleverness, and talking her into becoming his wife. Niu Ling acted on the ox's advice, with the promised results. They married, had children, and appeared to be leading a happy life.

Trouble came from the Jade Emperor, who resented the fact that his daughter's work of weaving beautiful clouds in the sky no longer occurred. When the daughter returned to heaven to visit, he caused a great river to flow across the sky that separated the Zhi Nu from Niu Ling. That river is what we know as the Milky Way. The two lovers we know as the stars Vega and Altair. Meanwhile, on earth, the magpies planed a solution to their problem. Every year on the anniversary of their meeting, they fly to the sky and form a bridge so they can again be united, if but for a day. With the moon in its first quarter on the seventh day of the lunar month, the Milky Way appears dimmer, and no longer separates the two lovers.

The seventh day of the lunar month in August is China's day for lovers, but celebrated especially by unmarried women. Young girls in new clothes will visit local temples to pray to Zhi Nu for cleverness. While there they may also recite the

traditional prayer for the ability to thread needles, symbolic of the acquisition of the traditional talents of a housewife.

Some temples dedicated to the child god Ne Zha (also known as the Third Prince) in Taiwan will celebrate his birthday on the same day as the Double Seventh Festival.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Double Ninth Festival; Dragon Boat Festival; Spring Dragon Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Doukhobor Peace Day

The Doukhobors were one of a variety of groups that grew out of the great schism in the Russian Orthodox Church that began in the reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681). Rejecting Nikon’s reforms were such groups as the Old Believers and the more mystical Khlysty, or People of God, who like the Quakers perpetuated a doctrine of the inner guiding light. The Doukhobors seemed to have been influenced by both the Khlysty and the Polish Unitarians.

In 1886 Peter Verigin (1859–1924) became the Doukhobor leader. Verigin absorbed the mystical and ethical views of fellow countryman Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), who had from his personal biblical study become a pacifist. Verigin led the group to accept pacifism and, going further, to deny to the state a variety of commonly accepted privileges. As people possess the spark of divinity within them, Verigin argued that it was wrong to kill another human being. Their refusal to allow young men in the group to be drafted into the army came to a climax in 1895.

The group has celebrated June 29, the feast of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul, as an important holiday. It was also Peter Verigin’s birthday. In the Russian Orthodox Church, the day is preceded by several weeks of fasting and an all-night prayer vigil the evening immediately prior. Verigin convinced his fellow believers that it was time to make a symbolic statement of their position, which they began with an Easter Day refusal by 10 men in the groups to participate in army training. Then on June 28, the members, some 7,000 in number, gathered all the weapons that still existed among them and, during the all-night vigil,

burned them in a large bonfire. This event of the “Burning of the Arms” lifted the group onto the international stage.

The burning of the arms also made their situation in Russia untenable, and with the assistance of Tolstoy and American and British Quakers, the group migrated to Canada, the first members arriving in January 1899 and settling in Saskatchewan. In 1902, the Russian government, which had arrested Verigin, released him and allowed him to migrate. He led the group until 1924, eventually being succeeded by his son, Peter Christiakov Verigin. Today the group continues in an often uneasy relationship with the Canadian government, with adherents scattered in several of the Western provinces.

The “Burning of the Arms” continues as an important annual commemoration among the Doukhobors, and has evolved into the annual Doukhobor Peace Day. It is often called simply Peter’s Day, the ambiguous reference to both the biblical Saint Peter and Peter Verigin fully accepted. Celebrations are limited to Doukhobor centers in western Canada, with one popular location for the celebration being Castlegar, British Columbia, where the Doukhobor Discovery Centre is located. Celebrations usually include a pilgrimage to Peter Verigin’s tomb in the nearby original Doukhobor settlement at Brilliant. It is also a day to participate in peace marches, support petitions for nonviolent action, and other peace-producing activities.

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See also Peter and Paul, Saint’s Day of Sts.; World Peace and Prayer Day; World Peace Ceremony.

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Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival occurs on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, generally in early to mid-June on the Western calendar. Like the earlier Spring Dragon Festival, it acknowledges the dragon, a symbol of the emperor in premodern China, and the dragon’s association with rain and water in traditional Chinese lore.

There are a variety of stories told about the festival. One of the oldest concerns Qu Yaun, an advisor to the ruler of Chu, one of seven states vying for power in the Warring States Period (476–221 BCE). Over time, his advice was rejected, and he was pushed from the court. Eventually, Chu was conquered by a rival nation, and



Two dragon boats compete during the annual race in Foshan, China, May 2009. The race occurs on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. (Guangliang Huo/Dreamstime.com)

Qu Yaun committed suicide by throwing himself in the river on the fifth day of the fifth month in 278 BCE. People attempted unsuccessfully to retrieve his body from the river. To prevent the fish from devouring the body, they threw rice into the river. At a later date, someone reported meeting Qu Yaun's spirit and was told that the dragon stole the rice thrown in the river.

Qu Yaun is now celebrated in the festival by the holding of dragon boat races on the anniversary of his death. Over the years, these have become a matter of intense athletic competition. The races were ritualized by having a Taoist priest (or in a more secularized setting, a VIP) touching the eyes of the dragon on the front of the boats, called *Awakening of the Dragon*, symbolically calling the dragon from his slumber and animating his *qi* (energy).

People also eat sticky rice that has been wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves. It was believed that wrapping the rice thrown in the river with leaves would keep the dragons from eating it.

In 1980, China added dragon boat racing to its list of national sports. By this time, the custom had spread across the land and to neighboring Vietnam, Japan, and Korea, and throughout the Chinese diaspora. The most heralded Dragon Boat Races are held annually in Hong Kong.

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See also Spring Dragon Festival.

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Durga Puja. See Navaratri

Duruthu Poya (Sri Lanka)

It is generally accepted that Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka when Mahinda, the son of the great Indian emperor Ashoka, arrived around 240 BCE. He converted the local king, Devnampiya Tissa (r. 244–207 BCE) who subsequently donated a tract of land for a temple, later known as the Mahavihara. A short time thereafter, he was joined by his sister Sanghamitta, who brought a clipping from the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha was said to have attained enlightenment. It was planted and still survives at Mahavihara.

There is, however, a second tradition that says that Buddhism first arrived on Sri Lanka when, only nine months after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha himself made an initial trip to the island. He arrived on Duruthu (January) Full Moon Day in the year 528 BCE and settled the conflict between two warring tribes and won them to Buddhism. Following his visit, a stupa (a structure to receive relics) was erected that contained a lock of the Buddha's hair. After his death, a relic in the form of his collarbone was brought to Sri Lanka and also placed in the stupa, now known as the Mahiyangana Cetiya.

Then in 523 BCE, the Buddha made a second visit to again to settle a dispute. A third and last visit was made at the invitation of King Maniakkhika, in 519–520 BCE. This time he was accompanied by 500 of his followers who remained in Sri Lanka when the Buddha returned to India. During this visit, the Buddha made an imprint of his left foot on top of the mountain Sumanakuta (later called Adams Peak).

Most Buddhists find no confirmation of the accounts of the Buddha's travels to Sri Lanka as recorded in the *Mahavamsa*, a poem compiled in the fifth century CE, which recounts the early history of the island, and they will not be mentioned in standard biographies. According to Sri Lankan Buddhists, however, the Buddha visited some 16 locations on the island, and during the time of Mahinda, stupas were built at each spot. Of these stupas, the Mahiyangana Stupa (in central Sri Lanka) is distinct, as it was built while reputedly the Buddha was still living.

When the Portuguese invaded in the 16th century, they destroyed Kelaniya and left the temple there in ruins. It was not until 1780 that King Kirti Sri Rajasinghe was able to renovate the temple. It was further developed and expanded in this century and is known for its statue of the reclining Buddha and two seated Buddha images. In 1952, the Sri Lankan parliament declared Kelaniya as a sacred city.

Today, Duruthu Poya is celebrated with a day of activity at the Mahiyangana Stupa (the site of Buddha's first visit), pilgrimages to Nagadeepa (site of the second visit, near Jaffna), a procession at the Kelaniya Temple (site of his third visit), and the beginning of the three-month pilgrimage season to Sumanakuta (Adam's Peak). A highlight of the celebration at Kelaniya is the Duruthu Perahera (procession) considered second only to the Festival of the Tooth at Kandy as a Sri Lankan

festive spectacle. This procession began in 1927, when Helena Wijewardena of Sedawatta Walauwa initially organized it as part of reviving Buddhist life at Kelaniya. Three years later, she commissioned artist Solius Mendis to restore the interior of the temple to its former glory. He devoted 20 years to create his unique murals with scenes of the life of Buddha, the history of Buddhism, and the history of Kalaniya.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Festival of the Tooth; Sanghamitta Day; Posen; Summer Solstice; Wesak/Vesak.

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Dussehra. See Navaratri

E

Easter

The high feast of the Christian church, Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even those churches that typically do not follow the liturgical year calendar will observe Easter. The timing of all of the other moveable feasts in the Christian year revolves around Easter, showing this event's central position in Christian doctrine and worship. Easter Sunday is preceded by the 40 days of Lent and Holy Week. The feast begins a 50-day season of "Eastertide" that includes Ascension Day and leads to Pentecost.

There is biblical and early church evidence that Christians originally celebrated the resurrection of Christ every Sunday. At some point in the first two centuries of the church, however, it became customary to further celebrate the event annually during the Jewish Passover season, the time of year when Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised.

Prior to the fourth century, because of its Passover associations, the holy day was called *Pascha*. The word for Easter in most European languages still derives from this root. However, the English word "Easter," which parallels the German word *Ostern*, has less certain origins. Saint Bede the Venerable (672–735 CE) was the first to suggest that the term comes from *Estre*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. A related and more commonly accepted theory is that the word originated from early Christian designation of Easter week as *in albis*, the Latin plural for *alba* ("dawn"). This word evolved into *eostarum* in Old High German, the precursor of the modern German and English term for spring. This parallels the development of the word "Lent," which also has spring connotations.

Easter, like the Jewish Passover, is a movable feast. Originally, churches in Asia celebrated Easter on the same day as Passover, regardless of the day of the week it fell. All other churches in other regions celebrated Easter on the first Sunday after Passover.

Based on a formula decided by the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. As a result, Easter Sunday can fall between March 22 and April 25, depending on the lunar cycle. To complicate matters further, most Eastern churches use the Julian calendar (as revised early in the 20th century) and a 19-year lunar cycle, while Western churches follow an 84-year cycle. Consequently, the Orthodox Easter sometimes falls on the same day as the Western Easter, while at other times, the two celebrations can occur as much as five weeks apart.



Hooded participants lead a float displaying the Virgin Mary during an Easter procession in Tenerife, Spain, in 2010. (Flavijus/Dreamstime.com)

While there are many and varied liturgical customs associated with Easter, the “Easter Vigil” serves as the core of the event’s worship activities. Before sunrise on Easter Sunday, worshippers gather in darkness for the lighting of the “Christ” or “Paschal” candle. From this new fire, worshippers light other candles to illuminate the entire sanctuary. Readings from the gospels and songs of praise accompany the celebration of lights.

The sanctuary is newly adorned in the colors of Easter: white and gold. White symbolizes the hope of the resurrection, as well as the purity and newness that comes from victory over sin and death. The gold symbolizes the light of the world brought by the risen Christ that enlightens the world. The cross is no longer draped in black. Instead, it is covered in flowers, and the top is draped in white.

The Easter Vigil has evolved into an outdoor sunrise service for many churches. The spreading dawn adds to the celebration of lights and candles. The practice may derive from the Gospel narrative of Jesus’s resurrection, which states that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb “while it was still dark” (John 20:1) or as dawn was breaking (Matthew 28:1 and Luke 24:1).

From the earliest days of the church, Easter has been the primary time for the baptism of new converts. It is a fitting time to celebrate not only Jesus’s resurrection from death to life, but also the symbolism of death and resurrection of the Christian through the waters of baptism. Those baptized changed into new white clothes to symbolize their new life in Christ. This has led to the tradition of buying new clothes at Easter.

Easter has accumulated many traditions derived from folk customs, many of which were associated with springtime fertility celebrations. For example, the popular modern Easter symbols of eggs and rabbits are ancient pagan symbols for fertility. The church prohibited the eating of eggs during the Lenten fast, so by the 13th century, the custom arose of collecting and decorating eggs that were laid during Holy Week in anticipation of breaking the fast. The egg itself became a symbol of the resurrection. Just as Jesus rose from the tomb, the egg symbolizes new life emerging from the eggshell.

The custom of associating a rabbit with Easter arose in Protestant areas in Europe in the 17th century but did not become common until the 19th century. The Easter rabbit was said to lay the eggs as well as decorate and hide them.

In many Catholic countries, all or part of Holy Week, including Easter as the culminating point, are celebrated as a single whole festival marked with processions, special church services, and various public celebrations. As with Christmas, the Ethiopian Orthodox church holds a unique Easter celebration each year.

Kevin Quast

See also Blajini, Easter of the; Easter (Ethiopian Church); Easter Monday; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Eostara; Holy Week; Lent; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Palm Sunday; Passover; Pesach; Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Easter (Ethiopian Church)

Easter, one of the major holidays of Christendom, is also celebrated by members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahdo Church, the established church of Ethiopia, which also operates among people of Ethiopian heritage worldwide. Among its followers are many who reside in Jerusalem, and among its possessions is the Deir al-Sultan monastery that is located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church is believed to have been built over the Golgotha Hill where Jesus was crucified. The monastery consists of two chapels and a set of tiny rooms in which the monks reside.

The Easter celebration begins on Palm Sunday, just after midnight. An eight-hour service culminates with the worshippers reciting a set of Palm Sunday

prayers to prepare for a procession in the courtyard of the Deir al-Sultan monastery. The procession makes four stops around the church's dome, with special prayers designated for each stop.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week, the monks and nuns and lay attendees gather in the chapel of the Four Living Creatures, one of the two rooftop chapels, to read the relevant scriptures of the day with commentaries from the *Liqawent*, an Ethiopian theological text.

Holy Week activities culminate on Holy Saturday, which commemorates the time that Jesus is said to have lain in the tomb and descended into the realm of the dead to release the captive held there. Orthodox Christians believe that at exactly 2:00 p.m., a sunbeam is said to have shined through the opening in the roof onto Jesus's now-empty tomb. That beam lights 33 candles held by the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who waits inside the tomb. The patriarch then brings the holy fire out of the tomb to light the candles of waiting worshippers. Confined to the church's rooftop, the Ethiopian faithful attend a separate Holy Fire ceremony on Saturday evening in the courtyard of the Deir Al-Sultan monastery.

By Easter Sunday, the church will have received the many pilgrims who make their way to Jerusalem annually. They will join with the small group who will gather on Maundy Thursday, the night of Jesus's Last Supper with the Twelve Apostles, and remain at the monastery in a prayerful vigil above the tomb of Christ. On Saturday, the church services with the Holy Fire begin in the early evening and continue into the wee hours of Easter morning. As the dawn approaches, it is then time to return to home and family and break the fast that has been followed for several days and begin a time of resting and feasting.

The monastery, once the possession of Coptic Christians, is the site of intense struggle between the Ethiopian and Coptic churches, as well as four other churches that also possess rights to parts of the church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Genna; Holy Week; Palm Sunday.

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Easter Monday

In the Christian liturgical calendar, Easter, the high point in the year, introduces a season of reflection on the meaning of Jesus's resurrection, which was most intense through the week immediately following Easter Sunday. In Europe, the

post-Easter festivities involved a variety of associated celebrations, some of which appeared to survive from pre-Christian spring rites, such as egg decorating and rolling, and others of which were extensions of Easter activities that gradually took on a life of their own, such as dousing other people with water. Originally, the water would have been blessed with holy water on the Saturday before Easter and then been taken to one's residence and sprinkled around the home as an Easter blessing. Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, the activities that generally fell on Easter Monday were collapsed into the Sunday activities, and the observance of Easter Monday, as indeed the whole of the week after Easter, was abandoned as a religious celebration. Surviving observances, however, can still be found.

Possibly the most active observance of Easter Monday remains in Eastern Europe and the lands around the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Both the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Eastern Catholic churches know Easter Monday as Bright Monday, a day to lead of Bright Week. Worship on Monday repeats the Easter liturgy with only slight variations and is marked by a procession led by someone carrying a cross. After worship, parishioners will spend the day visiting family and friends.

In the Catholic countries of Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary), around the 15th century, Easter Monday began to transform into Wet or Dyngus Monday, with possible influences from pre-Christian customs, Dyngus being an old Pagan deity representing water and the moist earth. Some trace the observance to the baptism on Holy Monday in 966 when Mieszko I, the duke of the Polans (c. 935–992) was baptized and, through the act, united Poland as a Christian nation. As the tradition was developed, it became a time for boys to douse girls with whom they wished to develop a romantic relationship. With parents' approval, they might sneak into the room of a prospective girlfriend and awaken her with water early in the morning. The more attractive girls might find themselves as repeated targets as the day proceeded.

Easter Monday traditions made their way to North America in the 19th century and at different places attained some importance. It was, for example, a public holiday in North Carolina for half a century (1935–1987). It found its most visible expression, however, in Polish-American communities, where Dyngus Day celebrations were organized. The largest continuing Dyngus Day event is held in Buffalo, New York, each spring, which has become a time to highlight a variety of Polish cultural contributions.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, Easter Monday now survives primarily as an alternative date for the celebration of the feast day of Saint George in those years in which his regular assigned calendar date of April 23 falls during Holy Week.

Easter Monday is also the day for the Procession of the *Fujenti* (Marian devotees) from Naples to the sanctuary of the bleeding Madonna dell'Arco at the Church of Saint Anastasia near Mount Vesuvius. The procession is led by a group

of men dressed in white, many barefooted, who walk the 12 kilometers to seek the Virgin's mercy.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; George, Feast Day of St.; Procession of the Fijenti.

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Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year

The Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church, the two main communions within the larger Christian tradition, began to diverge in the centuries after the great ecumenical councils and formally split in the 11th century, when the pope (the bishop of Rome) and the archbishop of Constantinople mutually excommunicated each other. By this time, a variety of differences (most relatively minor) had appeared in their liturgical calendars. These differences were greatly exaggerated by the move of Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585), who in 1582 oversaw the reformation of the calendar used in the West by deleting 10 days in the month of October. Inaccuracies in the older Julian calendar had led to the drifting of the vernal equinox (meant to be March 21) to March 10. This date was of significance as the calculation of the date of Easter Sunday was tied to the vernal equinox. By deleting 10 days from the calendar in October, he was able to reconnect March 21 and the spring equinox, and with subsequent improvements in the accuracy of the astrological calculations, Gregory's calendar evolved into the contemporary Common Era calendar, now used almost universally by the world's governments.

The Eastern churches were unimpressed by Gregory's reform and retained the Julian calendar. The days on which the major church festivals were celebrated thus continued to diverge century by century. By the later 19th century, however, pressure began to build within the Orthodox churches to revise their calendar. That pressure began with the development of more globalized trade that culminated in the 1884 agreement by a number of governments (including that of Turkey) to set up an International Date Line and a standard day to begin at midnight. The ecumenical patriarch, the nominal head of Eastern Orthodoxy, resides in Istanbul. The various churches of Orthodoxy were at the same time beginning to experience pressure from members who had moved to the West and found their days for

celebrating the major feast days of the church (especially Christmas and Easter) differing from that of the majority of their Christian neighbors.

In May 1923, at a synod in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Serbia were represented, Ecumenical Patriarch Meletius IV (r. 1921–1923) proposed a calendar revision that would, without adopting the Gregorian alterations, bring the Julian calendar into practical alignment with the Gregorian calendar, then still in a slow transition into what has become the Common Era calendar. This rectification was accomplished in October by dropping 13 days from the Julian calendar. Over the next half century, most other Eastern Orthodox churches adopted the revised calendar, most notably the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. Major churches that refused to adopt the revised Julian calendar include the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Russian Orthodox Church. This split in Orthodoxy means that those churches that continue to follow the Old Julian calendar will hold their major celebrations two weeks after those held by the Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This split is most noticeable relative to the celebrations on a fixed date each year (such as Christmas).

Whichever calendar a particular Eastern Orthodox church follows, its liturgical year begins in September (as opposed to the end of November in the Roman Catholic Church) and is built around 13 major festivals in between which there are designated fast days. These 13 festivals are:

Nativity of Mary (September 8)

Elevation of the Cross (September 14)

Entrance of Mary into the Temple (November 21)

Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ or Christmas (December 25)

Theophany or Epiphany (January 6)

Presentation of our Lord in the Temple (February 2)

Annunciation of Mary (March 25)

Entry into Jerusalem or Palm Sunday (Sunday before Pascha)

Pascha (or Easter)

Ascension (40 days after Pascha)

Pentecost (50 days after Pascha)

Transfiguration of our Lord (August 6)

Dormition of Mary (August 15)

These major feast days, which primarily commemorate events in the life of Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary, are further divided into two cycles. The first is built around Christmas, a date fixed on the calendar as December 25, and

hence feasts that always occur annually on the same date. The second cycle is built around Easter, which is on a different date annually, and hence feasts tied to it are on a different day each year, though always the same distance from Easter. Filling out the calendar are a variety of dates celebrating the life and death/martyrdom of a number of saints.

The church year begins on September 8 (Julian) or September 21 (Common Era) and proceeds through the fixed dates of the fall and winter months. As the spring begins, by which time the date of Easter has been calculated and made known to all, Lent begins a time of fasting that leads to Holy Week and Easter, the high point of the church year. The year continues with additional celebrative occasions celebrating Christ's Ascension, Pentecost, and the Transfiguration event (Matthew 17:1–9).

The major fast of the year is the Lenten fast, which begins on a Monday (not on Ash Wednesday) and lasts for seven weeks, ending on the Friday before Palm Sunday. For orthodox, fasting includes both refraining from the consumption of most animal products (meat, milk, and usually fish), oil (including cooking oil) and wine, as well as increased activity in prayer and other spiritual disciplines. The Lenten fast is followed immediately by Lazarus Saturday, which celebrates the resurrection implied in the raising of Lazarus by Jesus (John 11) and the Feast of the Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, which are immediately followed by the fast of Holy Week, leading up to Pascha/Easter.

The Fast of the Apostles begins on the Monday after the first Sunday following Pentecost and lasts until the feast day commemorating the Saints Peter and Paul. Depending upon the lateness of Easter in the calendar year, the fast may be as short of two weeks or as long as six. There is a two-week fast (August 1–14) immediately preceding the Dormition of the Theotokos (Mary, Mother of God), which commemorates the consummation of the Virgin Mary's earthly life and a 40-day fast that begins on November 15 and continues through Christmas Eve (December 24). There are single-day fasts on the day preceding Theophany/Epiphany, and the day of the commemoration of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist and the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross. Those seriously in the religious life will also fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

The Orthodox Calendar of Saints lists multiple saints for almost every day on the liturgical year. The major saints days include commemorations of a variety of biblical characters including the apostles Peter, Paul, and Andrew, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and from the Jewish Old Testament (Saint Elias, or Elijah). They are joined by a relatively small number of saints who have been designated "equal to the Apostles," in recognition of their contribution to the expansion of the church. A variety of people who like most of the apostles became martyrs for the faith were named as saints and their memory recalled on their death date (also seen as the day of their rebirth in or entrance into heaven). In later centuries, those saints who died a natural death were also remembered/commemorated on their death date. Major saint's days on the Orthodox calendar include:

Julian Calendar	Saints	Revised Julian Calendar
January 25	Saint Gregory the Theologian	February 7
January 30	Holy Day of Three Teachers of Orthodoxy (Basil/John Chrysostom/ Gregory the Theologian)	February 12
March 9	Forty Martyrs of Sebaste	March 22
March 21	Feast of the Emperor Constantine and Helena	April 3
April 23	Saint George the Miracle Maker	May 6
May 11	Saints Cyril and Methodius	May 24
June 24	John the Baptist, Nativity of	July 7
June 29	Saints Peter and Paul	July 12
July 15	Saint Vladimir	July 28
July 20	Saint Elias	August 2
August 29	John the Baptist, Beheading of	September 11
October 26	Saint Dimitrius the Martyr	November 8
November 8	Saint Michael and the Angelic Host	November 21
November 13	Saint John Chrysostom	November 26
December 6	Saint Nicholas the Wonder Worker	December 19
December 17	Saint Andrew	December 30
December 27	Saint Stephen	January 9

Additional saints, some of which are especially identified with a particular country or language group, include:

January 12	Saint Tatiana (Russia)	January 25
January 14	Saint Sava (Serbia)	January 27
January 14	Saint Nino (Georgia)	January 27
July 8	Epictetus the Presbyter and Aston (Romania)	July 21
August 9	Clement of Ohrid (Macedonia, Bulgaria)	August 22

The Eastern Orthodox Church has designated the first Sunday after Pentecost as All Saints Day, in which all the people who have attained sainthood are acknowledged. On the Saturday prior to the beginning of the Lenten fast, the Orthodox churches observe All Souls Day, a general acknowledgement of all deceased who have died in the faith. Services may be held in the home the church sanctuary or at the graveside, and may be directed to an individual family member or to all church members. An All Soul's service may be held as often as four times a year, but always on Saturday, in remembrance of Christ's resting in the tomb between the crucifixion and Easter.

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Saints Day; All Souls Day; Christmas; Common Era Calendar; Easter; Lent; Saints, Veneration of (Roman Catholic Tradition); Theophany.

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Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical Year

The Ecclesia Gnostica is the oldest organization in North America attempting to revive the ancient Gnosticism of the first and second century in the Mediterranean Basin and present it in a viable form for contemporary believers. The society can be traced to the career of James Morgan Pryse (1859–1942). Pryse led an independent Theosophical movement in New York City early in the 20th century. He later relocated to Los Angeles, where in 1928 he founded the Gnostic Society. The society is now a chartered lay organization of the church.

Meanwhile in Europe, a revived Gnostic tradition had developed and blossomed through the 20th century as a spectrum of Gnostic churches emerged from the original work of Jules-Benoît Doinel du Val-Michel (1842–1894). In the early 1950s, an independent British bishop, Ronald Powell (1919–1978), better known as Richard, Duc de Palatine, founded a set of related groups—the Pre-Nicene (Gnostic) Catholic Church, the Brotherhood of the Pleroma, and the Order of Saint Raphael. In 1959, Stephan Hoeller was appointed to oversee the work of de Palatine in America and was consecrated a bishop by him in 1967. After the death of the Duc de Palatine in the 1970s, the work he established in America continued under the name Ecclesia Gnostica. The Gnostic Society subsequently united with the Ecclesia Gnostica and now functions as its affiliated lay organization.

The Ecclesia Gnostica has close fraternal relationships with several additional Gnostic groups, including the Eglise Gnostique Catholique Apostolique in France, Saint Timothy's Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (headed by Bishop Timothy Brister), and the Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum of Palo Alto, California. The Ecclesia Gnostica and its affiliated centers offer weekly Sunday morning Eucharistic services utilizing a form of the Western liturgy revised to align with its Gnostic theology. It has developed a liturgical year that would be familiar with Roman Catholics and others who follow an annual cycle of Christian worship built around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as it evolved in the Middle Ages.

The modern Gnostic liturgical year takes seriously the four major points of the solar year (the solstices and equinoxes), the insights of the psychology of

Carl G. Jung, and the major highlights of the traditional Christian calendar. The solstices and equinoxes, seen as modeled in the four points of a cross, mark both the extreme seasons of darkness and light and the median of balance between them. Also halfway between them, approximately 40 days after each, a point in time exists that represents the culmination of forces characteristic of the season. This candle Mass (February 2) is the culmination of winter and the anticipation of the coming light. In like measure, Ascension Sunday follows the spring equinox (and Easter), Lammas follows the summer solstice, and Halloween and the related All Saints and All Souls days follow the fall equinox.

With these eight cardinal points anchoring the calendar, a variety of additional days provide the spiritual seeker with a host of additional spiritual landmarks that are designed to guide and nurture the soul on its spiritual journey. To the Western Christian, they will mostly be very familiar:

Epiphany

Ash Wednesday

Lent

Palm Sunday

Good Friday

Pentecost

Advent

Christmas

Then, added are the days of some familiar Christian figures—John the Baptist, Michael the Archangel, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Nicholas. While the Blessed Virgin Mary is not mentioned in the Gnostic calendar, the days normally associated with her have been assigned to the Holy Sophia, the feminine aspect of the highest God and in so doing given a Gnostic interpretation.

Unique to the Ecclesia Gnostics are the days set aside to honor the Gnostic/Esoteric figures such as Valentinus and Mani, and the days devoted to familiar Christian figures who are seen from a quite distinct perspective by Gnostics such as Mary Magdalene and the apostle Thomas. Then of course, there are the days that honor events in Esoteric history in which martyrs are remembered—Montségur Day and the day of the Martyrdom of the Holy Templars. More than any other elements, these days give a distinct cast to the Gnostic liturgical calendar and highlight the very different way (from that of the mainstream Christian tradition) that they see the playing out of Western history. (The *Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum* uses a close variant of the Gnostic Ecclesia's calendar.)

The Gnostic Liturgical Calendar

December 20–21	Winter Solstice
January 1	New Year's Day
January 6	The Epiphany
February 2	Candlemas Day
February 14	Valentinus, Day of the Holy
March 16	Montségur Day
March 21 or 22	Spring Equinox
Post–Spring Equinox movable feasts	
	Palm Sunday
	Maundy Thursday
	Good Friday
	Holy Saturday
	Festival of the Risen Light (Easter)
	Ascension Day
	Pentecost (Whitsunday)
	Trinity Sunday
June 3	Corpus Christi
June 21 or 22	Summer Solstice
July 22	Mary Magdalene, Day of the Holy
July 31	Lammas
August 6	Transfiguration of the Lord
August 15	Sophia, Assumption of the Holy
September 8	Sophia, Descent of the Holy
September 20 or 21	Fall Equinox
September 29	Day of the Holy Archangel Michael (Michaelmas)
October 4	Day of the Holy Francis of Assisi
October 13	Templars, Day of the Martyrdom of the Holy
October 31	Eve of All Saints Day/Halloween
November 1	All Saints Day
November 2	All Souls Day
	Advent
December 21	Winter Solstice; Day of the Holy Apostle Thomas
December 22	Day of the Holy Archangel Raphael
December 25	Feast of the Nativity (The Coming of the Divine Light)

J. Gordon Melton

See also Corpus Christi, Feast of; Mary Magdalene, Day of the Holy; Montségur Day; Pentecost; Sophia, The Descent and Assumption of Holy; Templars, The Day of the Martyrdom of the Holy; Valentinus, Feast of the Holy.

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Elephant Festival

The Elephant Festival is an annual celebration unique to Thailand that brings together the well-loved massive animals, which in centuries past were used to do heavy work and played an essential role in the Thai army. A Buddhist sanction to the festival has been generated by reference to a teaching given by the Buddha, who considered the experience of a wild elephant when it is caught: it would be harnessed to another elephant that had already been trained and domesticated. Analogously, a person who has just become attracted to Buddhism should develop a special friendship with an older, more mature Buddhist. The Elephant Festival, held on the third Saturday of November, is said to highlight this teaching.

The most spectacular location for the Elephant Festival is Surin, in northeast Thailand. Annually, some 200 elephants are assembled to show off their traditional talents to a large crowd in a circus-like setting. Interspersed with the demonstrations of traditional elephant hunts, races, battle reenactments, a tug of war between elephants and teams of Thai army personnel, and varied demonstrations of the large animal's strength and intelligence are a variety of Thai cultural performances by humans. A highlight of the day is a reenactment of a war elephant parade.



Elephants enjoy a feast during the Elephant Festival in Thailand. (Puwanai Ponchai/Dreamstime)

As the festival has been increasingly discovered by tourists, all but the most rudimentary connections to Buddhism have been submerged to respond to the demands for a performance to an increasingly secular audience.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Asalha Puja Day; Magha Puja Day; Ploughing Day.

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Elevation of the True Cross (September 14)

The Feast of the Adoration and elevation of the True Cross is the Eastern Orthodox observance of the anniversary of the finding of the cross upon which Jesus is believed to have been crucified. In the fourth century, Saint Helena (c. 248–c. 329), the mother of the emperor Constantine (r. 306–337), traveled to the Holy Land, where she searched for any relics relative to Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. Several stories are told of her focus upon possibly uncovering the cross upon which Jesus died. The most common one suggests that after letting word out of what she sought, she was finally told by a local resident of the location, a site on the hill which

had been designated as Golgotha, the hill upon which the crucifixion occurred.

Upon digging at the site, three crosses were uncovered, along with a sign board upon which Jesus’s name appeared (Matthew 27:38). The problem now became determining which one was Jesus’s cross as opposed to the two upon which the thieves died. That determination was made when one of the three crosses proved to be the source of some miraculous healings. Subsequently, part of the true cross was carried back to Constantinople, and part was placed in the care of the bishop of Jerusalem and later kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, initially erected as ordered by Constantine and completed in 335.



Jesus of Nazareth bears his cross in this painting created ca. 1907. The true cross, the one Jesus carried and on which he was crucified, was recovered by Saint Helena. (Library of Congress)

The Feast of the Elevation of the True Cross is celebrated on September 14 on the Julian calendar (September 27 on the Ethiopian and Common Era calendars), the anniversary of the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In 614, the Persian emperor Khosrau II (r. 590–628) captured Jerusalem and subsequently carried the piece of the cross away from the city. In 628, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius defeated Khosrau and recovered the relic. He took it to Constantinople but then returned it to Jerusalem in 630. It was finally captured by the Muslim leader Saladin in 1187 and never again seen. Most of the surviving relics of what purport to be fragments of the True Cross now reside in Europe, in churches and monasteries of the Roman Catholic Church, though the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahdo Church claims to own several fragments given to it during the Middle Ages.

The Eastern Orthodox churches continue to commemorate both Helena's discovery and the return of the True Cross by Heraclius. They also celebrate the Procession of the Cross (August 1), the day on which the piece of the True Cross kept at Constantinople until the 13th century would be carried through the streets in the hope that it would protect the city from disease and disaster. In those churches where a bishop is present, the celebration includes the bishop bringing the cross from the church altar into the midst of the congregation and bowing before it. In services where no bishop is present, the priest displays the cross, but does not bow down.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross; Meskal; Procession of the Cross.

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Ember Days

Ember days were periods for solemn observations of the religious life introduced into the Western Christian church in the third century by Pope Calixtus I (r. 217–222). Each quarter as the seasons change, the Ember days were set aside for fasting and a more serious consideration of the believers' religious commitments. The practice may have derived from older purification times set aside by followers of the pre-Christian Pagan religions. The exact dates varied from century to century until 1095, when the present dates were fixed by Pope Urban II at the councils of Piacenza and Clermont. By the sixth century, the Ember days were designated as the time for the ordination of priests.

As fixed, the Ember days are the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following the first Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, Holyrood Day (or the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, September 14), and Saint Lucy's Day (December 15). The beginning of Lent and Pentecost (late May–early June) are movable days that change annually depending upon the date of Easter. The week of the Ember days was designated an Ember Week, and that Friday came to be known as Golden Friday.

The observance of Ember days was widespread in England at the time of the Reformation, but came under severe criticism. Many churches had what was termed a rood-screen or rood-loft, which held a large crucifix and accompanying images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Apostle (both present during Jesus's crucifixion) in a worshipful pose. The winding stair that led up to the rood-loft would also provide a platform from which the biblical lessons could be read. Many of these lofts were destroyed as Protestantism became established throughout the country.

The reduction of the importance of Ember days was part of the vast adjustments of the liturgical calendar made in 1969 by the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican placed the celebration of Ember days in the hands of the national conference of bishops in each country. They are lightly acknowledged in many places and most observed in rural areas of Europe. In the Anglican tradition, the Ember Days have become days of prayer for the contemplation of the individual priest or lay persons own role in ministering to others.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross; Lent; Pentecost; Lucy, Saint's Day of St.

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Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple. See Presentation of Mary, Feast of the

Eostara (March 21)

Eostara is one name under which contemporary Pagans and Wiccans, followers of the goddess-oriented religion revived by Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964) in the 1950s celebrate the spring equinox. Eostara was a German goddess of the dawn who gave her name to a month, whose name would later survive in the spring celebration of the resurrection of Jesus—Easter. Most of what we know of Eostara comes from a book, *Temporum Ratione* by the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735) who

mentions in passing the time of Passover was formerly known as *Eostremonth*, a month named for an Anglo-Saxon goddess celebrated in the springtime. He said

Eosturmonath has a name which is now translated “Paschal month,” and which was once called after a goddess of theirs named Eostre, in whose honour feasts were celebrated in that month.

Some have associated Eostara with eggs, but there is little evidence for any connection. In fact, some scholars have pointed to Eostara’s absence from the classical Norse texts as a sign that she did not exist or existed only as a minor limited tribal deity.

Modern Pagans pour all of the symbolism of a reviving spring into Eostara and see it as a time to actually put into action the plans that have been made in the weeks since Imbolc. It is also a time to express the gifts of fertility that are seen with the planting of seeds and the coming together of the goddess with her consort. It is a time for courting and the coming together of the male and female life forces.

Over time, contemporary Pagans have drawn on a variety of the early religious tradition that celebrated the spring equinox to expand their celebration of the event around themes of balance (between light and dark), rebirth (of nature), and harmony (within the human community).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; Easter; Fall Equinox; Imbolc; Lammas; Litha; Passover; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Eostre. See Eostara; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal)

Epictetus the Presbyter and Astion, Saints Day of Sts. (July 8)

The monk and martyr Epictetus (b. c. 226–290) lived in Bithynia (now northern Turkey along the Black Sea) in the last decades of the third century. He became a Christian as a young man and found his way to a monastery, where he was eventually ordained as a priest. He emerged as a healer and wonderworker. He was

influential in convincing another young man named Astion (b. c. 255–290) also to join the monastery.

During a time of persecution of Christians in Bithynia, in 273, Epictetus and Astion relocated to Halmyris, south of the mouth of the Danube, where the Romans had a fort from which they patrolled the river and the west coast of the Black Sea. They would spend the next 17 years living quietly but for the reputation they developed for the many miracles attributed to their ministrations. As a result of the healings they facilitated, many became Christians.

In 290, Latronianus, the military commander of the district, learned of the two men while on a visit to the outpost. The Roman priests accused them of using sorcery to convert people and persuading many not to make the sacrifices to the gods. Latronianus had the pair arrested and tortured. When they refused to renounce their faith, he had them beheaded on July 8, 290.

Their bodies were later placed in the basilica that the emperor Constantine (272–337) had built in Halmyris. In the seventh century, a set of earthquakes in the region altered the course of the Danube, and Halmyris lost its relevance to the Byzantine Empire that then controlled the region. The city was abandoned. It fell into ruins, and the remains of the two martyrs were lost to history.

Modern archeological exploration in 2001 led to the discovery of the burial crypt of Sts. Epictetus and Astion. Later that year, the Romanian Orthodox archbishop Theodosius of Tomis oversaw the reburial of the pair. Their feast day is July 8 on the Julian calendar. They are primarily remembered in the rites of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Forty Martyrs' Day; George, Feast Day of St.

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Epiphany

Falling on January 6, Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the revelation of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. In Greek, the word “epiphany” means “manifestation,” and in Eastern Christian tradition, the event is called “Theophany,” which means “manifestation of God.” In the Eastern tradition, it falls on January 19. Roman Catholics will often celebrate it on the Sunday closest to January 6.

The Western observance commemorates the visitation of the biblical Magi to the child Jesus, stressing the appearance of Jesus to the Gentiles. In many Hispanic and European churches, it is also known as “Three Kings Day.” Eastern Christians

include the baptism of Jesus in their celebration, highlighting Christ's revelation to the world as the Son of God.

Marking the 12th day of Christmas, Epiphany brings to an end the Advent and Christmas seasons. The day begins an extended period of "Ordinary Time" in the Christian year that focuses on the mission of the church in the world to reveal Jesus as the Son of God. It is also a time of focusing on Christian unity and fellowship across ethnic and racial lines.

Originating in Eastern Christian churches, the earliest reference to the feast is found in 361 CE in the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 330–395 CE). In a sermon delivered on December 25, 380, Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389 CE) referred to the day as "the Theophany" and explained how in the coming weeks, the church would be celebrating "the holy nativity of Christ." On January 6 and 7, he preached two more sermons, declaring that the celebration of the birth of Christ and the visitation of the Magi had already taken place and now Christ's baptism would be recognized.

Originally, the day was part of the Christmas celebrations of the nativity, but by 534 CE, the Western Church had separated it as a commemoration of the coming of the Magi. The Eastern Church continued to celebrate January 6 as a composite feast for some time, but eventually reserved January 6 as a commemoration of the baptism of Jesus.

The colors of Epiphany are usually the colors of Christmas, white and gold. Epiphany liturgies stress the universal mission of Jesus Christ and his church to all peoples throughout the whole world.



Worshippers celebrate Epiphany in Kiev, Ukraine, in 2010. (Viktord50/Dreamstime.com)

While Anglicans and Lutherans observe Epiphany, most Protestant churches ignore it and collapse into Christmas their discussion of the visit of the Magi and the related custom of giving gifts. In the last generation, with the spread of the acknowledgement of the liturgical year among some of the large Protestant groups (Methodists, Presbyterians), some notice of Epiphany has emerged. Epiphany is the reference for the popular Christmas song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”

The day after Epiphany is called Distaff Day, or Roc Day. It is not a holiday as such, but a designation of the day when people in general and women in particular resumed their normal routine following the Christmas season break—that is, the 12 days of Christmas. It is hardly observed today.

The change of the calendar in Western Europe altered the celebration of Christmas and Epiphany in several ways. When the new day was seen as beginning at sunset, the celebration of Epiphany began what is now thought of as the evening of January 5, when church services and other activities would celebrate the arrival of the Wise Men (the Magi) in Bethlehem to worship the baby Jesus.

In England, the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar (now the Common Era calendar) in 1752 (some two centuries after its adopting in most Catholic countries), meant that some 11 days were dropped between September 2 and 14 of that year. That change meant that the Old Christmas Day everyone was used to now occurred on January 6 (or Epiphany) in the new calendar. Some people were confused, others were simply angry, and many continued to keep the Old Christmas Day for a number of years, a small and rapidly declining number to the present.

Kevin Quast

See also Befana; Christmas; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Giant Lantern Festival; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Theophany; Three Kings Day, Native American Pueblos.

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Equinox. See Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Fall Equinox

Esala Perehera. See Festival of the Tooth

Eshinni-Kakushinni Memorial

At the Sixth World Buddhist Women's Convention (1978), attendees created a memorial celebration for Eshinni, the wife of Shinran Shonen (1173–1263), the founder of the Jodo Shinshu tradition, the tradition with the largest following among Japanese Buddhists. Over the centuries, some scholars had expressed strong doubts about the very existence of Eshinni and hence many commonly accepted details of Shinran's life, including the relationship of him to Kakushinni, his youngest daughter, who cared for him during the last years of his life and saw to his funeral arrangements. These doubts were not laid to rest until 1921, when Professor Washio Kyodo discovered a set of 10 letters that had been lost in the Honpa Hongwanji archives in Kyoto that proved to have been written by Eshinni to her daughter, Kakushinni. The letters documented Shinran's marriage and family, and confirmed the key role that the two women played in Shin-shu history. The Women's Convention, at its 13th gathering in Brazil, created a memorial to Kakushinni. These would subsequently be combined into the present Eshinni-Kakushinni Memorial celebration.

In 1207 CE, Shinran, who had left Tendai Buddhism and associated with Honen, the founder of the Pure Land tradition in Japan, was forced into exile when the government moved against the growing movement. In the process, he lost his status as a monk and returned to life as just a lay Buddhist. Shortly thereafter, he married Eshinni. They had six children. After almost a half century of marriage, in 1256, Eshinni moved to Echigo, accompanied by three of their children, to assume oversight of property that she had inherited. Meanwhile, Kakushinni remained in Kyoto to care for the aging Shinran. Following his death in 1263, she established the gravesite and chapel that would evolve into the Hongwanji, the main temple of the Shin tradition.

Shinran died virtually unknown outside the relatively small Jodo Shinshu community. Wanting to keep his teaching alive, Kakushinni built a temple/shrine that evolved into an official temple, and Kakushinni is credited with the foresight that saved Shinran's work and led to the establishment of the Jodo Shinshu tradition. She oversaw the Kyoto shrine for some years and then passed the role of Monshū, the title of the spiritual leader of the Jodo Shinshu movement, to her son. That position has remained in the family, and the leader of the Honpa Hongwanji, its largest branch, is still a direct descendant of its founder.

The Eshinni-Kakushinni Memorial celebration is held in Jodo Shinshu temples around the world each October, the organization and leadership being placed primarily in the hands of the women.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Buddhist Churches of America Founding Day; Shinran Shonin, Birthday of.

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Ethiopian Church—Liturgical Year

The liturgical year for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church is based on the Ethiopian calendar (which is also used by the minority Christian community of neighboring Eritrea). This calendar is based on and quite similar to the Coptic calendar used by the small Orthodox Christian community of Egypt, from which the Ethiopian church received its Episcopal order. The Ethiopian calendar dates its beginning from the Annunciation of the angel to Mary that she was to become the mother of Jesus (Luke 2:27–38).

The Ethiopian calendar was developed from the calculation of an Egyptian monk, Annianus of Alexandria, who resided in Alexandria during the reign of Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, at the beginning of the fifth century CE. Annianus wrote a world history that dated Creation on March 25, 5492 BCE. By a series of additional calculations, Annianus arrived at the Annunciation, the date on which Jesus incarnated in the body, as being on March 25, 9 CE (according to the Julian calendar). The civic year began seven months earlier, on August 29, 8 CE. Eventually, most Christians, including those of what became the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, accepted the historical chronology proposed by Dionysius Exiguus (c. 470–c. 544), who placed the Annunciation eight years earlier than had Annianus. The Common Era calendar basically uses Dionysius’s calculations for its beginning point.

The Ethiopian year is divided into 12 months of 30 days each, followed by a short month of 5 days (or 6 days during leap years). The 12 months and their first day on the Common Era calendar are:

Mäskäräm	Begins September 11
Ṭəqəmt	Begins October 11
Hasdar	Begins November 10
Tahsas	Begins December 10
Tarr	Begins January 9
Yäkatit	Begins February 8/9
Mägabit	Begins March 10
Miyazya	Begins April 9
Ganbot	Begins May 9
Säne	Begins June 8
Hamle	Begins July 8
Nähase	Begins August 7
Pagamen	Begins September 6

The major points of the Ethiopian liturgical year begins with New Year's Day or Enkutatash, which also celebrates the day of the return of the queen of Sheba from her visit with King Solomon in Jerusalem (as recorded in Chapter 9 of the second book of Chronicles in the Jewish Bible). Mäskäräm 1, the first day of the first month of the Ethiopian calendar (usually September 11 on the Common Era calendar), occurs at the end of the rainy season in Ethiopia.

The first major date of the new year occurs on September 27. Meskal celebrates the finding of the True Cross by Saint Helena (c. 248–c. 329), the mother of the emperor Constantine (r. 306–337). Following the privileging of Christianity throughout the empire, Helena traveled to the Holy Land, where she discovered a number of objects reputed to be relics of biblical times, none more heralded than the cross upon which, it was claimed, Jesus was crucified. In a ritual reenactment, branches of the meskal plant are decorated with flowers and set ablaze, as the empress Helena had lit incense and followed the smoke to the location of the three crosses, one of which was the one on which Jesus died.

Toward the end of November, Ethiopian Christians will begin a 40-day fast that prepares them for the celebration of Christ's birth called Genna or Lidet. Fasting is an important part of Christian observance, occurring every Wednesday and Friday and the month prior to Christmas. Celebrated on January 7, Christmas is highlighted by an all-night, candlelit prayer vigil on Christmas Eve, a Christmas meal, and watching children play the Genna game (similar to field hockey), which Ethiopians believe was played by the shepherds following their learning of Christ being born from the angels (Luke 20).

Possibly the highest point of the year is Epiphany or Timkat, which occurs on January 19. The three-day celebration begins on Epiphany Eve with a colorful procession to the local lake or river. On Epiphany itself, the gathered assembly reenacts the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist (Mark 1:8–12). There is another process back from the water to the church and continued celebrating through the next day.

The Easter season occurs in the spring Easter being celebrated on the second Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, thus usually in April. It is preceded by Palm Sunday and Good Friday. No fasting is practiced between Easter and Pentecost, the last major day on the liturgical year.

Maskal, Genna, Timkat, Good Friday, and Easter are public holidays in Ethiopia.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Easter (Ethiopian Church); Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Elevation of the True Cross; Epiphany; Genna; Good Friday; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Meskal; Palm Sunday; Pentecost; Timkat.

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Eucharistic Congresses

Eucharistic Congresses are large public gatherings, usually held in locations where Roman Catholics are the majority (or a significant minority), to celebrate, advocate, and discuss the reality of the Holy Eucharist, in which Catholics believe the real presence of Christ substantively exists under the guise of bread and wine. Such gatherings allow the faithful to publicly express their faith in the holy Eucharist and allow the church to demonstrate its centrality to a Roman Catholic existence. The congresses seek to promote devotion to the Holy Eucharist as the heart of Catholic worship and draw out the implications of it for the structuring of the daily life of believers.

An initial congress, with a small attendance, was organized by Bishop Gaston de Ségur at Lille, France, in 1881. With steadily increasing support, a similar event was held every one to two years through the decade. The sixth congress gathered at the recently opened Basilique du Sacré-Cœur in Paris in 1888, by which time a permanent organization had arisen to plan future congresses.

Following a hiatus of several years, the eighth Eucharistic Congress convened in Jerusalem for a week in May 1893. Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) took notice of the event and sent a papal legate in the person of Benoît-Marie Cardinal Langénieux (1874–1905), the archbishop of Rheims. Langénieux would help gather the prelates of the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches to join in the common affirmation of the Eucharist, an important event in lessening the hostility that had marked the relationship between the various churches' bodies for a millennium. He would host the same bishops at Rheims at the next Eucharistic Congress. Langénieux was also known as a friend of working people, and he used his position to introduce social issues into the deliberations of the Rheims Congress. For the remainder of his life, the congresses would be in French-speaking countries.

In 1905, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) invited the Eucharistic Congress to Rome and opened it by personally celebrating Mass. He followed his participation in the conference by issuing an encyclical later in the year, calling the faithful to a daily partaking of communion. By this time, a number of national congresses were being held—France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, England, Canada, Australia, and the United States—each of which fed into the emerging international Congress. In 1908, a major step forward for the congresses was made with the holding of the international Congress in London. While there had been a steady growth of the Catholic Church since it was legalized in the 19th century, a measure

of anti-Catholic feeling from the days of the Protestant Reformation remained in the public consciousness. Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli's (1836–1930) arrival as the papal legate marked the first time in 350 years that a papal legate had been to England. He was accompanied to the sessions by an impressive representation of the church's hierarchy—some 90 bishops, archbishops, and cardinals. The Congress marked a significant shift in England's Christian community. The first International Eucharistic congress in the United States was held in 1926.

In recent years, the International Congress has been held quadrennially with 21st-century gatherings being located in Rome (2000); Guadalajara, Mexico (2004); and Quebec City, Canada (2008). It has been common for the reigning pope to attend what has become an event attracting tens of thousands to the outdoor worship services. Benedict XVI was in Quebec City in 2008 for the event, which also celebrated the 400th anniversary of the city's founding and was broadcast internationally on television. A volume containing an account of the proceedings and major papers delivered at the Congress has regularly been published following each International Eucharistic Congress.

The Eucharistic congresses have involved Eastern Orthodox and Anglican participants, but few from the other Protestant and Free Church communions, most of whom do not share the belief in the real presence of Christ in the sacraments and many of which specifically deny the specifically Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Corpus Christi, Feast of; Jubilee Year.

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Evtimiy of Bulgaria, Saint's Day of Patriarch (January 20)

Patriarch Evtimiy of Bulgaria (also known as Saint Evtimiy of Tarnovo) (b. 1325) was the last patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to lead the church before the fall of Bulgaria to the Ottoman Turks. He was born in the 1320s into a prominent family in the Bulgarian capital, Tarnovo. As a young man, he decided to become a monk and attached himself to Kilifarevo Monastery, where he became the assistant to the famed Theodosius of Tarnovo, a leading exponent of the

mystical prayer format called *hesychasm*, usually associated with Eastern Orthodox hermits. After Theodosius's death, Evtimiy went to the Great Lavra monastery, the oldest of the monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece. After a number of years on Mount Athos, he returned to Bulgaria and, in 1371, founded the Holy Trinity Patriarchal Monastery near Tarnovo.

The next phase of his life centered on the school at the monastery, where Evtimiy dedicated himself to retranslating many Bulgarian religious books, which had been wrongly or sloppily translated in previous centuries. These new editions became standard works for the several churches using the Church Slavonic language—Serbia, Romania, Russia—besides his own Bulgarian Church.

In 1375, Evtimiy succeeded Patriarch Ioanikiy (Joanicius) as head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Evtimiy enjoyed many years as head of the church, but his reign came to an abrupt end in 1393 when the Ottoman Muslim forces overran the country. He led the defense for Tamovo, which lasted for three months, but the city finally fell. Islam was established in the city, and Evtimiy was sent into exile to Bachkovo Monastery in southern Bulgaria near Asenovgrad. He died and was buried there in 1402.

With the movement of the Ottomans into Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church ceased to exist as an independent body and was reabsorbed back into the Ecumenical Patriarchate based in Constantinople. It would not reemerge until the end of the 19th century.

Patriarch Evtimiy was later canonized and his saint's day set for January 20. That is the same day as that of the person whose name he adopted as his religious name, the Palestinian hermit Saint Euthymius the Great (377–473). As Bulgaria emerged from centuries of Ottoman control, Evtimiy became a most honored personage throughout the country. A statue was erected in the center of Sofia.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Clement of Ohrid, Saint's Day of St.; Nino, Saint's Day of St.; Sava, Saint's Day of St.

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Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of (December 18)

Through the Middle Ages, part of the church kept March 25 as the date of the Feast of the Annunciation while at the 10th Council of Toledo (656 CE), the bishops of Spain had decreed that a solemn feast in honor of the Annunciation should be celebrated on December 18. They felt that the joyous occasion represented by the Annunciation did not resonate with the more solemn feeling evoked during the Lenten season. Then, in the 11th century, the Spanish church adopted the March 25 day for the Feast of the Annunciation; it also continued the special worship on December 18 as a day of special graces for expectant mothers. This day came to be called the Feast of the Expectation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1725, Pope Benedict XIII (r. 1723–1730) introduced this feast to the larger church, which, through the 19th century, gradually adopted it, though it was never added to the liturgical calendar for the whole Church. The new feast integrated with the Advent season by calling believers, as part of their preparation for Christmas, to identify with the expectation that the Virgin must have felt in anticipation of Jesus's birth.

Through the 19th century, this day was a public holiday in many Catholic countries. Not widely observed today, the day is mostly celebrated in Spain, Portugal, Poland, and Italy. Mary's anticipation of the birth is also the subject of a novena (a nine-day devotional practice) that is designed to be pursued from December 16 to 24, some formats being especially recommended to women have experienced trouble conceiving and/or bearing a child. In art associated with this day, the Virgin is shown in the last stages of her pregnancy.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Annunciation, Feast of the; Christmas; Epiphany; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin.

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Fall Equinox

The fall equinox was one of four points in the year (the others being the winter and summer solstices and the spring equinox) discovered and marked by ancient peoples who observed the heavens. At the summer solstice, from an observer in the Northern Hemisphere, the sun rises at a point farthest to the north and is in the sky the greatest amount of time. As the days pass, the sun rises at a point slightly further south each day and finally reaches a point, three months later, around September 21, when it is in the sky for 12 hours, and below the horizon for 12 hours. That point is the equinox. Viewed from above earth, the equinox is that point where the center of the sun is passing through the plane created by the Earth's equator. (Following the winter solstice, the sun will appear to be moving north and again reach a point where the day and night are equal—the spring equinox.) In the Southern Hemisphere, the fall equinox is March 21.

The fall equinox was celebrated in temperate climates as the end of the harvest season. Greek mythology had a popular story for this time, related to Persephone (or Kore) the young maiden who was the symbol of fertility. At the fall equinox, she goes (or is abducted by Hades) into the Underworld, where she reigns for six months, and her mother Demeter mourns for her. Without Persephone, the world grows infertile for half the year and awaits rebirth in the spring. Thus, the fall festival would be a time of joyfulness, celebrating a full harvest, but with a note of sadness over the coming winter.

Around the world, most cultures celebrated a mid-autumn harvest festival, but it would become an equinox festival for cultures that operated on a solar calendar. Thus, much of Asia did not have their harvest festival on the equinox as they operated primarily on a lunar calendar.

The fall equinox was not recognized as a significant event in either the Christian or Jewish calendar, and Muslims operated on a strictly lunar calendar. As these three religions rose to prominence, any celebration of the fall equinox was almost totally abandoned.

The celebration of the fall equinox has been revived by the modern Wiccan/Neo-Pagan movement and its eight equally placed annual holidays (usually called Sabbats). The fall equinox is acknowledged as the harvest festival, but as few modern Pagans are farmers, the sabbat (sometimes called Mabon), has become a time for inner reflection. All of the myths related to journeys to the underworld have been collected and related to the inner exploration of the subconscious and unconscious, to contemplate death and understand the cycles of life, death, and new birth. On the Common Era calendar, September 21 is the beginning of



Druids participate in a procession celebrating the fall equinox at Primrose Hill in London in 2009. (Brian Parkin/Dreamstime.com)

fall; thus, Mabon becomes the moment for a last summer outing to a Pagan gathering, functioning in the United States, for example, in a manner similar to the purely secular celebration of Labor Day (the first Monday in September).

The Japanese observe Higan, a time to remember ones' ancestors, twice annually, as the spring and fall equinoxes. During Higan, people will visit graves and think about those who have died, especially those who have passed away in the last year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Calendars, Religious; Eostara; Higan; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice; Wicca/Neo-Paganism Liturgical Calendar.

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Farvardigan. See **Zoroastrianism**

Fasching. See **Mardi Gras**

Fasinada (Montenegro)

On July 22, 1452, on a crag jutting out of the Bay of Boka Kotorska, on the Adriatic coast of Montenegro near the town of Perast, some people found a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Around the crag, a manmade island emerged, built by sailors scuttling old boats and depositing stones around it. Subsequently, a church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin was built on the island at that spot. At the time, Perast and the bay had been absorbed into the Venetian Republic (1420).

Our Lady of the Rock Island lies about some 400 meters northeast of another island, Saint George, home to a Benedictine monastery. Our Lady of the Rock survives only because generations of mariners have constantly enlarged and reinforced the island by adding deposits of stones. The original church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1667 but rebuilt. The statue of Our Lady of the Rock rests on the main altar.

Today, each year on July 22, members of the Perast sailing community bring stones in their boats and drop them into the sea around the island. It has become a way to both honor the Virgin and reinforce the island, which faces constant erosion by the waters of the bay.

In recent years, the city of Perast has also organized a regatta, in which upwards of a hundred sailing boats compete for a “cup” and an inscription on the plaque inside the lighthouse of Our Lady of the Rock, where people gather for the awarding of the prizes.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aparecita, Feast of Our Lady of; Miracles, Feast of Our Lady of; Peace and Good Voyage, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Fast of Gedaliah

The Fast of Gedaliah is a day set aside to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed official charged with administering the Jewish population remaining in Judah following the destruction of the Temple and exile in 586 BCE. The fast is referred to in the biblical Book of Zechariah when some people approach the priests of the temple and ask about continuing the observance of the mourning and fasting in remembrance of the destruction of the temple, now that Jerusalem had been restored and the temple rebuilt. He eventually replies that God had plans for their future prosperity, and the four fasts that they were observing would one day be celebrated with joy and gladness. The implication was the remembrance of the siege of Jerusalem, the ultimate fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the assassination of Gamaliel would remain in place for the time being.

After the capture of Jerusalem, a number of prominent Jews were taken into exile. The killing of Gedaliah led to a second group being carried into exile. The contemporary fast day is observed on the third day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei (immediately after Rosh Hashanah). The book of Zachariah mentions the month of observance (the seventh) but not the day. The Babylonian Talmud set the third day of Tishrei as the date of the fast. Observant Jews fast from sunrise to sundown. Special prayers are added to the worship service for the day. If this day would fall on the Sabbath, its observance will be held on Sunday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fast of the First Born; Hanukkah; Rosh Hashanah; Tisha B'Av.

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Fast of the First Born

A unique observance in Judaism, the Fast of the First Born is conducted by all males who happen to be the firstborn child in their family. If the firstborn child was a female, the first born after her is not obligated to keep the fast. It is the only fast in Judaism that is seen as neither to atone for sin nor to petition God. It is also the only fast that is kept by just a segment of the community. The fast is a remembrance that the firstborn children of the Hebrews were saved from the deaths that overtook the firstborn of Egypt. The Fast of the First Born normally falls on the day before Pesach, but should that day be a Sabbath, it is moved to the previous Thursday (it being forbidden to fast on the Sabbath).

There is an interesting way to avoid the fast. Fasting in Judaism is prohibited on an otherwise celebrative occasion, such as attendance at a religious feast. It is also customary to throw a feast for someone who has just completed the study of a portion of the Talmud. Many rabbis will hold a study session on a text of the Talmud early on the day before Passover and afterward invite attendees to join him for refreshments. In some poorer communities, a wedding would be held on this day and invite the firstborn to the wedding feast, which would exempt them from the fast.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fast of Gedaliah; Pesach.

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Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of (May 13)

The Feast Day of Our Lady of Fatima calls attention to the Marian apparitions and messages vouchsafed to three children between May 13 and October 13, 1917. Fatima is a small town in central Portugal, some 90 miles north of Lisbon, that in 1917 was the site of what became the most famous modern apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The subject of the apparitions were three children—Lucia Dos Santos (age nine), Francisco Marto (age eight), and Jacinta Marto Age (age six)—who initially experienced visitations from an angelic being in the spring of 1916. The angelic visitation heralded the first vision of the “beautiful young Lady,” dressed all in white and bathed in light, who appeared to them on May 13, 1917. The three children were told to come to the place where this first visit had occurred on the 13th of every month for the next five months. She then challenged the children with a seemingly mature query for their youthful age, “Do you wish to offer yourselves to God in order to accept all the sufferings He wishes to send you, in reparation for sin and for the conversion of sinners?”

As announced, subsequent apparitions occurred on the 13th day each month. Meanwhile, the children faced ridicule from many of the townspeople and the press, and hostility from authorities. Then on October 13, the apparitions culminated with a miraculous promised occurrence. As some 70,000 people trekked to the site of the previous apparitions, where nothing had been seen by any but the three children, all were treated to a spectacular meteorological occurrence. The rain stopped, the clouds parted, and a bright round disk shown in the sky. The disk began to spin, throwing off sparks of light. The phenomenon of the dancing “sun” continued for almost half an hour. All, believer and nonbeliever alike, saw it. At the close of the event, the sun seemed to plunge downward toward the crowd and all felt the heat as their rain-soaked clothing dried.

Over the months of the apparitions, the Blessed Virgin had little by little communicated a significant body of material to the children. Most of the content concerned the people’s need to pray for Russia, then in the throes of revolution. The lady asked the pope to consecrate Russia to Mary’s Immaculate Heart. The most intriguing part of the material given to the children remained confidential for the time being. This secret message, in three parts, was partially revealed in 1927. The first part concerned a vision of hell, and the second spoke of the consequences of sin and the need to spread the message of the Immaculate Heart. The third part was, until the year 2000, known to only a small circle of church leaders in the Vatican. It was a prophecy of an assassination attempt against the “bishop in white.” Since 1981, this prophecy was seen by many who knew of it to speak of the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) that occurred on



Worshippers travel to Fatima Sanctuary in Fatima, Portugal, on May 13, 2009. (Ruigouveia/Dreamstime.com)

May 13, 1981 (coincidentally, the anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima). As it happened, the would-be assassin pulled the trigger of his gun just as the pope reached down to bless someone carrying a picture of the Virgin. He later attributed his surviving the incident to Mary's intervention. In 1982, he visited Fatima and placed the bullet from the assassination attempt in Mary's crown. He subsequently oversaw (and nurtured) the process of canonization of the two children, Francisco (d. 1919) and Jacinta (d. 1920).

Fatima has been officially recognized as a place of pilgrimage since 1930, still drawing about five million visitors a year. Especially after World War II, devotion to Our Lady of Fatima has spread worldwide, and is expressed, among other ways, through active support from the Vatican, and in dozens of church-acknowledged branch shrines elsewhere in the world.

According to the Fatima devotees, Mary's messages include an entreaty for the world to give itself over to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (and acknowledge her work in the process of salvation). Then, the conversion of Russia will occur, and a Kingdom of Peace will be realized on earth, in which all those who believe in Jesus Christ, ask for remission, and subject themselves to the pope will be protected against the devil. The formal dedication of Russia to the Immaculate Heart occurred in 1952. In 1984, Pope John Paul II had the statue of Mary brought from Fatima to Rome, where he more formally consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 2000, he oversaw the canonization of Francisco and Jacinta. He also established May 13 as the Feast Day for Our Lady of Fatima. Pope John

Paul's actions elevated Fatima beside Lourdes as one of the two most important of the many sites that have experienced apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

Lucia (1907–2005) died the same year as Pope John Paul II, on February 13, keeping alive the importance of the 13th of the month for events relative to the apparitions. Most recently, on the third anniversary of Lucia's death, Pope Benedict XVI, who succeeded John Paul II, announced that he had waived the normal five-year waiting period before formally opening the process leading toward canonization as a saint.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Heart of Mary, Feast of the; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Rosary, Feast of Our Lady of the.

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Fat Tuesday. See Mardi Gras

Feast for the Three Days of the Writing of the Book of the Law (April 8, 9, 10)

The Feast for the Three Days of the Writing of the Book of the Law celebrates the founding event in the new religion of Thelema proposed by ritual magician Aleister E. Crowley (1875–1947), a British Esotericist who had previously associated with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a modern magical order that

attempted to revive the practice of medieval magical practices. Magic was conceived as both a means of personal development and integration as a means of gaining mastery of one's social environment. A significant step in magical development was become attuned to the Higher Self usually stated as gaining conversation with one's Holy Guardian Angel.

In the spring of 1904, at a time when Crowley was attempting to establish such contact, he was in Egypt with his wife Rose Kelly (1874–1932). He had previously attempted to make contact with his holy guardian angel by following the instruction in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, a medieval text, but was having little success. His wife, however, received what she interpreted as a psychic message from the ancient Egyptian deity Horus. Crowley proceeded to test her in part by taking her to the Cairo Museum, where she pointed out a stele that included the image of Horus. It was exhibit number 666, a number which Crowley used to speak of himself, a sign of his youthful religious rebellion from his Christian parents.

Convinced that his wife's message was meaningful, upon returning to his hotel, Crowley invoked Horus, and then on three successive days, April 8, 9, and 10, Crowley received material from a spiritual entity named Aiwass, whom he believed to be his holy guardian angel. He wrote the materials down and it became a small volume called *Liber Al vel Legis*, or the Book of the Law. This book supplied the basic insights that would come to distinguish Thelemic magic from the Golden Dawn and other previous magical systems. Crowley would later see the giving of the Book of the Law as the moment of the beginning of a new aeon, with himself as its prophet.

The Book of the Law laid out some basic ideas that were to come to dominance in this new aeon. The work of magic was aimed at the discovery of one's true purpose in life, which afterward one was compelled to follow, summarized as "Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law," frequently misunderstood as a libertine notion of doing whatever one's whims dictate. Rather, all of one's inclinations or loves were to be subordinated to the True Will, summarized as "Love Is the Law, Love Under Will." These admonitions were then placed in a very individualistic notion of the social universe in which harmony arrived, when each individual followed his or her True Will, summarized as "Every Man and Every Woman Is a Star."

The text of the Book of the Law was in places quite cryptic, and not only did Crowley later write two commentaries on it, but other accomplished magicians have also attempted to decipher all of its message. Reproducing and disseminating copies of the Book of the Law is a primary task for Thelemic magicians and the several organizations they have since organized.

Thelemic magicians, true to the individualism that permeates the movement, will commemorate the giving of the Book of the Law in a wide variety of ways. They will send greeting cards to other Thelemites; they will gather for meals, read from the Book of the Law, and toast their mentor; or engage in their own magical operations. Some may gather at noon each day and read aloud a chapter of the Book of the Law.

J. Gordon Melton

See also First Night of the Prophet and His Bride; Spring Equinox (Thelema).

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Festival of Light (Rosicrucian) (December)

The Festival of Light, held on or near the winter solstice each year, is the primary holiday celebratory event for members of the Ancient Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC), popularly called the Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians are a fraternity that traces its history to ancient Egypt, but which, in its modern incarnation as the Ancient Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis, was founded in 1915 by H. Spencer Lewis. AMORC has since grown into a large international organization with members in many countries.

AMORC is an esoteric organization which traces his history to the mystery schools of ancient Egypt. Its teachings fit within the larger Western Esoteric tradition but are a confidential matter for the members. The materials on the teachings, which members receive as lessons sent to their homes, cover the wide range of subjects of concern to esotericists. They instruct members on the way to develop psychically and spiritually and to guide them on a path toward spiritual enlightenment. The winter solstice is seen as an auspicious time for gaining greater personal illumination and an expansion of individual consciousness, and an especially beneficial time for prayer, meditation, and reflection.

The winter solstice occurs when, because of Earth's tilt, the Northern Hemisphere is leaning farthest away from the sun. It is the shortest day of the year; actually, in the extreme, the number of daylight hours is reduced to zero. The physical situation, with little light, accentuates the divine Light within each person, and thus establishes the opportunity for personal insight and development at this time of year.

Throughout the world, Rosicrucian lodges and chapters organize events as close to the winter solstice as possible, which provides time to reflect, meditate, and celebrate the Festival of Light. It is designed as a ritual whose aim is the "raising of humanity's consciousness through hope and love to bring about World Peace."

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Festival of the Tooth

Though relics are not an essential part of Buddhism, they have made a place for themselves in both personal and communal piety. Following the death of the movement’s founder, Gautama Buddha, his body was cremated. His ashes contained various objects—teeth and bones—and several followers of royal status expressed a desire to possess some of the relics. They were divided into eight sets, each of which was given to a different ruler. Then, several centuries later, King Ashoka conquered much of India and, he reassembled the relics and redistributed them both in India and internationally.

Among the most well-known of the Buddha’s reputed relics is found in Kandy, at the center of the island nation of Sri Lanka. There, one may visit the Buddha’s tooth, now housed in a golden stupa, known as Malagawa Vihara (or Dalada Maligawa), a building constructed to house the relic, located in the royal palace complex. The tooth can never be seen by the average person, as it is kept deep inside multiple caskets, but twice daily is the subject of daily rituals in the inner chamber of the stupa led by the monks in veneration of it. Each Wednesday, the tooth is symbolically bathed in scented holy water and fragrant flowers. This water is believed to have healing powers, and following the bathing ritual is dispersed to those present.

Since its arrival in Kandy in the fourth century CE, a variety of celebrations were organized to honor the sacred tooth; however, the tooth relic was the property of the king and the common people were not allowed to worship it. At the same time, the possession of the tooth relic was associated with royal power. He who possessed the tooth was deemed to possess the authority to rule Sri Lanka. That power was challenged on several occasions. It was captured and taken to India in the 13th century, and the Sri Lankans fought a war to get it back. The Portuguese attempted to convert the people to Catholic Christianity, and took the captured tooth to Goa, where they reduced it to dust and threw it into the sea. The devout believe the tooth survived either by reconstituting itself or being hidden away and replaced with a duplicate before the Portuguese arrived. When the British examined it, they reported seeing something resembling a crocodile’s tooth; however, they were also aware that colonial rule was greatly enhanced by taking possession of the tooth.



Traditional dancers perform during the Buddhist Festival of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka, on August 5, 2009. (AP/Wide World Photos)

In the middle of the 18th century, King Kirti Shri Rajasinghe (1747–1782) who ruled from Kandy, opened the possibility of veneration of the tooth to the population at large by initiating the practice of taking it out of the stupa in a procession during which the citizenry was invited to see the tooth's encasement and offer their prayers.

The procession centered on the tooth was integrated into an earlier Tamil Hindu festival that centered on asking a set of deities—Natha, Vishnu, Katharagama (a.k.a. Lord Murugan or Subrahmanya) and the goddess Pattini, for rain. This festival, locally called the Esala Perehera, now lasts for more than a week during the month of Esala (July or August on the Common Era calendar) and is built around a series of parades or processions through Kandy. The processions take place each evening and grow in intensity night by night.

The festivities begin with the cutting of a Jack Tree, dividing it into four parts, and planting one part (a pole) in each of the Kandy temples of the four guardian deities. The main priests of the four temples lead the processions each evening with their poles. They are followed by dancers, singers, drummers, spearmen, and people bearing sacred flags and canopies.

The festivities culminate on the night of the full moon with the Kumbal Perahera, beginning at the Malagawa Vihara with the ascension of the Buddha's tooth relic to its position on the ceremonial elephant. The Maligawa procession with the relic then joins up with the Devala (temple) procession, and assumes the

lead position. The main elephant with the tooth is followed by other elephants, each beautifully decorated. The Maligawa's procession is followed in order by the retinue from the Natha Devala, the Vishnu Devala, the Katharagama Devala, and the Pattini Devala.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Elephant Festival; Wesak/Vesak.

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Festivus (December 23)

Festivus is a contemporary secular holiday that appears to have originated as the idea of writer Daniel O'Keefe in 1966. The idea came to O'Keefe while working on a book, *Stolen Lightning*, which attempted a social analysis of magic and the paranormal element in human life. It began as a celebration for himself and his wife, and expanded as the children were born and a family emerged. The family celebration came to include a wrestling match among the children in the family, an effort to deal with personal grievances, and a yearly theme.

Festivus remained a family tradition until O'Keefe's son included elements of it in a plot line in an episode of the popular comedy television show *Seinfeld*, for which he was a writer. The episode, which aired on December 18, 1997, added several items to the celebration. The kid's wrestling match, for example, was replaced with a wrestling competition initiated by whoever was head of the family. It also made a place for an undecorated aluminum pole (which replaced an expensively decorated Christmas tree).

The *Seinfeld* episode (which has subsequently been rerun on numerous occasions) had the effect of planting the idea of celebrating Festivus as a new winter holiday into the mind of numerous people, some of whom began to hold Festivus parties. In 2000, Ben & Jerry's created a new (if short-lived) Festivus ice cream flavor. Within a couple of years, Festivus wine, clothing, and greeting cards were being marketed, and a variety of Festivus satires on other winter holidays emerged.

The holiday appears to be gaining acceptance as an alternative celebration for those who do not follow a religion, and for the religious who just cannot get enough. It is recommended as a celebration for Unbelievers, though in 2001, Humanists began to hold their own winter holiday on the same December 23 on which Festivus is celebrated. Festivus is still largely unknown by the general public, in part due to its primary role as a family and intimate small-group celebration that does not lend itself easily to large public gatherings. Those who wish to keep up with the emerging traditions and ways of celebrating the holiday may go to the Festivus Internet site at <http://www.festivusbook.com/>.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Hanukkah; HumanLight; Winter Solstice.



A Festivus pole stands in the Illinois state capitol building in Springfield, Illinois, on December 23, 2008. (AP/Wide World Photos)

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Fiesta dos Tabuleiros

Tomar is a small town in central Portugal up the Tagus River from Lisbon. For a week, every four years, it becomes the gathering spot for thousands of visitors to join in the Festa dos Tabuleiros (literally, the Festival of the Trays), a celebration with roots in the 14th century. A tabuleiros is actually an elaborate headdress which will be worn by a number of young girls in a religious procession in the square before the Church of Saint John the Baptist (São João Baptista).

Tomar was a stronghold of the Knights Templar in the 12th and 13th centuries, but the Templar order was formally dissolved by Pope Clement V (r. 1305–1314) in 1312, after its leadership in France was arrested and executed. In Portugal, the Templars disbanded and founded a new Order of Christ, and the fortress in Tomar became one of the order's strongholds. Its symbol, the Maltese Cross, became omnipresent in Tomar.

The fiesta appears to derive from an old custom in the town of distributing food to the poor. The custom may go back to pre-Christian times, but has been linked in recent years to Queen Isabel I (1271–1336). Isabel, later known as Saint Elizabeth of Portugal, had a reputation for saintly activity. In 1309, for example, she had a church, the Chapel of Saint Vincent, constructed at Obidos (a town west of Tomar traditionally attached to the queens of Portugal). The church was the founding place of the new Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, a lay fraternity organized to care for the ill and other good works. Near the church, she ordered the construction of houses for the care of lepers. The third association is with a wealthy local woman, Donna Maria Fogaça, who in a time of famine, had bread baked from her own storehouse and given to the hungry. She urged those who were fed to make a procession in thanksgiving to God. The present process derives from an older procession that honored God as the Holy Spirit with symbolic offerings of bread, wine, and meat. Once blessed, the food is then distributed to the poor.

As the festival has evolved, it is held over a five-day period in early July, ending on a Sunday when the main procession occurs. Preparation begins weeks in advance with a general clean-up and decoration of the town and its homes. As the festival begins, it features concerts, bullfighting, dances, parades, and feasting. Fireworks are heard day and night. In the evening, areas will be lit with decorative lamps.

The main procession is held on Sunday, and begins with High Mass at the church of Saint John the Baptist. After lunch, people gather in the church square. The grand process is introduced with fireworks (sky rockets) and led by musicians. The main spectacle, however, was the hundreds of girls wearing the tabuleiros. These are huge headpieces made with bread to be blessed and flowers. Each headpiece is supposed to be equal in height to the girl wearing it, and crowned with a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Their dress is white, long-sleeved and ankle length. Each girl is escorted by a young man. The women are groups by the local parish they represent, and all the headpieces from a single parish will resemble each other in color scheme and its selection of flowers.

Once in the square, the man removes the headpieces, and as the couple waits, a priest roams through the square blessing the bread. After the blessing, the headpieces are placed back on the girl's heads and they leave the square, followed by some carts with wheat stalks and wine, and some colorfully decorated oxen. The next day, the meat from the oxen, the bread, and the wine would be distributed to the poor.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Divine Holy Spirit Festival.

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First Night of the Prophet and His Bride (August 12)

Thelema (from the Greek word for “will”) is the new religion that grew out of a magical working done by Aleister Crowley in 1904 and the resulting reception from the dictation of a spirit entity named Aiwass of the Book of the Law, the sacred text of the thelemite religion. That religion is represented in a spectrum of organizations, most notably by the several branches of the Ordo Temple Orientis. Thelema is a magical religion, based in the practice of ritual magic.

August 12 is one of a set of holidays celebrated by Thelemites that commemorate the founding events of the new religion. On August 12, 1903, founder Aleister Crowley married his first wife, Rose Edith Kelly (1874–1932). She soon afterward played a significant role in the development of the religion of Thelema.

In the spring of 1904, she and her new husband traveled to Cairo, Egypt. Crowley, still in a relatively early stage of his magical career, was having difficulty in establishing contact with the entity known by magicians as their holy guardian angel. Establishing contact with and later merging with this higher aspect of one’s own inner being is a major step in magical/spiritual development.

While in Cairo, Rose indicated that she was receiving messages from Horus, one of the ancient Egyptian deities. In the process of convincing her husband of the truth and validity of her messages, she accompanied him to the Cairo Museum, where she pointed out an object on display, a stele, now known as the Stele of Revealing in Thelemite circles, which Aleister founded especially significant.

Having been convinced that Rose was being contacted by Horus, he subsequently performed a magical invocation of the god. At her direction, at noon on three successive days (April 8–10), he sat in his room and, for an hour, wrote down what he heard dictated to him from a shadowy presence who identified himself as Aiwass, the name of his holy guardian angel. At one point he failed to hear a sentence, which Rose later supplied. The finished product of the dictation was a book, *Liber Al vel Legis* (the Book of the Law), which became the sacred text of the Thelemite religion. For her role in prompting the reception of the Book of the Law, and the subsequent proclamation of a New Aeon that began with it, she is remembered and honored by Thelemites worldwide.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Feast for the Three Days of the Writing of the Book of the Law; Spring Equinox (Thelema).

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First Salmon Rites

Various Native American groups that resided along the Pacific Coast included the several species of salmon as an important element in their diet. The coincidence of the movement from winter to spring, and the major migration of salmon up the rivers and streams for the purpose of spawning, led to the ritualizing of the event in preparation of the harvesting of the fish. First salmon rites are integrated into the religious life of such peoples as the Yurok, Shasta, Tolowa, Sinkyone, and Kato people of Northern California; the Tillamook, Siuslawans, and Alseans of Oregon; and the Chinook and Quileute of Washington.

Native American viewed the salmon as immortal beings who sacrificed themselves for the sake of human beings. The first salmon rites are designed to offer thanksgiving for and appreciation of the salmon, in part to ensure a good hunting season and the repetition of the occurrence in future years, and to acknowledge the dependence of the people on the salmon for their survival. If the first salmon respond to the group's initial greeting, they will return to the sea and encourage the main body of the salmon to swim to the sites from which the group gathers its food. Respect for the salmon is shown in harvesting it only to the extent that meets the group's needs.

Rituals vary along the coast, with those in Northern California appearing to be the most formal. The timing of the rites would vary from year to year based upon the weather but would occur in March or April, and as soon as the weather began to warm, daily attention would be given to spotting the first salmon to arrive. The ritualist in charge of the ceremony would prepare himself for a week and then personally spear the first fish. The fish would then be cooked on a sacred fire specifically generated for this purpose, and the fish consumed according to tradition by the ritualist's assistant. This would be done in a separate space, often away from the main body of the group, and in some instances in great secrecy. Following the ceremony, the head and bones would be returned to the water so it could return to the ocean and be reborn, and the ritualist would declare the salmon fishing season formally opened. No salmon was to be caught and eaten prior to this moment. The holding of the rite served the purpose of regulating salmon fishing and prevented overharvesting.

The arrival of non-Native peoples, the development of commercial fishing, and the placement of dams on the major rivers of the northwest United States all contributed to the disruption of Native fishing patterns. While the first salmon rite

continues to be practiced in some locations, it has disappeared among many of the Native people. It was, for example, noted that on April 20, 1956, the last of the first salmon rites was conducted at Celilo Village, which was located on the Oregon side of the Columbia River at Celilo Falls, where a new dam had completely disrupted the salmon spawning cycles.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Acorn Feast; Potlatch.

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Floating Lantern Ceremony (Honolulu). *See* Obon Festival(s)

Florian, Saint's Day of St. (May 4)

Florian (c. 250–304 CE) was one a number of Christians who died in the widespread persecutions of the Christian movement by the Roman emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305). He was a Roman army officer in the Roman province of Noricum, located in what is today Austria and Slovenia. Among his duties was fire control. Little is known of his life except that when ordered to make a sacrifice to the Pagan deities, he refused. He was subsequently beaten, tortured, and then killed by drowning. A stone was tied around his neck, and he was thrown into the Enns River.

According to legend, his body was recovered and buried. In the 10th century, a priory was founded at the site of his grave, and the town of Sankt Florian grew up adjacent to it. His body was reputedly recovered and was eventually removed to the Augustinian Abbey of Saint Florian, near Linz. Saint Florian came to be widely venerated throughout Central Europe. In 1184, Pope Lucius III (r. 1181–1185) gave some of the recovered relics of Saint Florian to Casimir II, the high duke of Poland (1177–1194), and to Bishop Gedko of Kraków. Catholics in Krakow claim to still possess some of his relics. He is a patron saint of Poland and Austria.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Agnes, Feast Day of St.; George, Feast Day of St.

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Flower Communion

The Flower Communion service, emerged as a new celebration among Unitarians even as Unitarianism was being established in post–World War I Czechoslovakia (in what is now the Czech Republic). In 1921, Dr. Norbert F. Capek (1870–1942) arrived in Prague and began to build the church, which attracted people of different backgrounds. Capek sought a means to ritualize the new unity that was emerging and found the solution in the Flower Communion, which he introduced on June 4, 1923.

Capek asked church members to bring a flower and place it in a vase they found near the entrance. This initial act symbolized their freely joining the church and maintained their uniqueness, while the bouquet created from all the flowers symbolized the congregation’s unity. The bouquet was then brought into the meeting room and was consecrated with prayer. At the end of the service, people returned to the vase and took a different flower with them as they returned to their home. The service became a strong statement of community.

The idea of the Flower Communion was brought to the United States by Dr. Capek’s wife Maja and introduced to the congregation at Cambridge, Massachusetts. From there, the practice spread among Unitarians across North America and then in Europe. It continued to spread following the Unitarian merger with the Universalist Association in the 1960s.

There is no particular day set aside for the Flower Communion, nor is it prescribed by the international church leadership. Local congregations are free to adopt and use it as they will. It has proved popular as a means of focusing community in an increasingly diverse membership whose religious perspective stretches across a variety of religious traditions.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Lotus, Birthday of the; Sakura Matsuri.

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Forgiveness, Feast of (August 2)

The Feast of Forgiveness (or Pardon) emerged as the Franciscan order was being established by Saint Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226). While the story of the establishment of the annual festival is poorly documented, the earliest material about it suggests that Francis persuaded Pope Honorius III (r. 1216–1227) to offer pilgrims to the Portiuncula, the church that was also the headquarters of the order at Assisi, a plenary indulgence when they visited and partook in the process of confessing their sin and receiving the word of pardon.

The pope's gift to Francis was unique at the time, as previously, the only way to receive such an indulgence was to go on a crusade. More recently, the privilege has been extended. Today, any of the faithful may go to their own parish church to receive the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist between noon on August 1 and midnight on August 2 and receive the indulgence as if they had gone to Assisi.

It was on August 2 the Portiuncula was dedicated and Saint Mary of the Angels designated as its patron. The annual reenactment of the Forgiveness ceremony has continued through the centuries and continues to draw thousands from across Italy. The small abandoned chapel that Francis originally repaired and inhabited has been preserved within the large basilica that has been built over it.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Paryushana.

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Forty Martyrs' Day (March 9)

Forty Martyrs' Day commemorates the death of a group of Roman soldiers who were killed because of their profession of Christianity during the persecutions of Christians by the emperor Licinus (r. 308–324). They were killed near Sebaste, Armenia, in 316 CE, just as the status of the church throughout the Roman Empire was changing; and as Constantine extended his authority to the Eastern Mediterranean, the persecution stopped. In 324, Constantine (r. 306–337) defeated Licinus, assumed authority at



This 13th-century engraving shows Saint Francis of Assisi preaching to birds in a tree while another monk sits at his feet. (iStockphoto)

Constantinople, and empowered the church. However, the incident at Sebaste was fresh in the memory of the quickly emerging church. The earliest recognition that a memorial service was being held is given by Saint Basil, later bishop of Caesarea (370–379), whose two homilies on Forty Martyrs have survived.

According to Saint Basil, the 40 soldiers were condemned to be left exposed without clothes on a frozen lake pond to freeze to death. One of the 40 recanted his faith, but one of the guards suddenly converted, took off his clothes, and joined the remaining 39. At dawn, the bodies were burned. Christians collected the relics and distributed them widely. One of the several churches build in the martyrs' honor was at Caesarea, the church where Basil gave his discourses on them.

Veneration of the Forty Martyrs is most widespread in the East. Among the more prominent churches dedicated to them is the cathedral at Aleppo (in Syria). Eventually their feast day was set for March 9. It was intentionally set during the 40 days of Lent. In the West, veneration of the martyrs dates to the early fifth century. Special devotion to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste was introduced at an early date into the West. Saint Gaudentius (d. 410) was given the relics on a visit to the East, and he deposited them in the cathedral he had built at Brescia when he became bishop. A church dedicated to them was built soon afterward, on the site now inhabited by the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua. In the West, the Forty Martyrs are celebrated on March 10. Among the more famous sites dedicated to the Forty Martyrs is the monastery in the desert at Mount Sinai.

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste are not to be confused with other sets of martyrs, such as, for example, the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, a group of Roman Catholics who were executed for treason and related offenses in England between 1535 and 1679, as the Protestant Reformation moved forward, or the Forty Martyrs of Rome, who also were soldiers.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Agnes, Feast Day of St.; George, Feast Day of St.; Nino, Saint's Day of St.; Vartan's Day, St.

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Founders' Day (Salvation Army) (July 2)

The Salvation Army was cofounded by William Booth (1829–1912), a Methodist minister, and Catherine Mumford Booth (1929–1890). William was born into a

working-class family in Nottingham, England, converted to Methodism at age 15, and eventually became a preacher. His passion to bring the gospel to the poor, rather than stick to the parish he was assigned by the Methodist Conference, led to their separation. Catherine was born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, and converted at the age of 16. She met William when he preached at the church she attended. They fell in love and were married in 1855. Early on, she assisted his work by speaking at children's meeting.

William Booth left the Methodists to begin evangelizing the poor in London. He founded his independent work, later to be named the Salvation Army in 1865. As he gathered a flock, he also became more aware of the economic problems they faced and considered possible ways of changing society for their benefit. Initially, a set of social services were set up, including food shops, shelters, and homes for girls who had become pregnant out of wedlock. His work led to his famous publication, *In Darkest England—and the Way Out*, which included an ambitious plan to change England. Following up on his own ideas, he founded a labor exchange, a missing-persons bureau, and a farm colony, among other services.

As the Salvation Army was reorganized on a military model, William became the general and Catherine the "Army Mother." The Army had already become an international organization prior to Catherine's death in 1890 and continued to expand globally over the next 22 years of William's life.

After World War I, Army leaders began to think about the heritage from which they derived. In 1920, for the first time, they held a Founder's Day observance, on April 10, William's birthday. Army members around the world were asked to pause for a moment and offer thanks for the gift of William Booth to the world. A similar observance was held in 1921. Then in 1922, the date of observance was switched to August 20, the anniversary of Booth's death 10 years previously. Special services were held in each corps (congregation) to honor him.

After several years without a Founder's Day commemoration, in 1925, what would henceforth be called Founders' Day was held on July 5, the anniversary of the initiation of the Salvation Army in 1865. This was the first celebration to honor both William and Catherine as cofounders, and even extend the celebration to include others who had helped spread the Army in the early days. Founders' Day continued to be celebrated on July 5 through the 1930s, but early in the 1940s, it was changed to July 2, which historians had discovered to be the day in 1865 that Booth came to Whitechapel (in London) and preached in the first tent meeting, which was held on the old Quaker Burial Ground. Founders' Day continued to be held annually on July 2 to the present.

Besides the July 2 date, the various national units of the Army have their own dates to remember. The U.S. Salvationists, for example, remember March 10 as the date in 1880 when the first Army leaders sent by Booth to develop work in the United States arrived in New York.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Founders' Day, the Church of Perfect Liberty.

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Founders' Day, the Church of Perfect Liberty (August 1)

The Church of Perfect Liberty (PL Kyodan) is a Japanese new religion founded by was founded by Rev. Tokuharu Miki (1871–1938), who began his religious life as a Zen Buddhist priest. Chronically afflicted with asthma, Miki was healed after Tokumitsu Kanada, who accepted him as a disciple and taught him the Sacred Rite of *Ofurikae*, by which Miki had been healed. He also introduced Miki in the Eighteen Precepts of the Tokumitsu Church he had founded. Shortly before his death, Kanada told Miki that three more precepts were to be revealed. He instructed him to plant a tree at his gravesite and wait there until the additional precepts were revealed. It would be five years before the precepts were finally revealed and Miki subsequently founded what would evolve into the PL Kyodan in 1924.

Like many new religions in Japan, Miki’s church was suppressed as World War II began. Miki responded to this situation by praying that God cut his life short by 30 years and that his sacrifice would ensure the survival of the church’s teachings and hasten the arrival of world peace. He passed away a short time later on July 6, 1938.

He was succeeded by his son, Rev. Tokuchika Miki (1900–1983). He continued in moving the evolving church forward, though having to spend several years in jail as the war heated up. He led in the adoption of the present name of the church in 1946. The next year he publicly revealed for the first time the 21 Precepts by which the church is guided. He also led in the construction of the new church headquarters in Tondabayashi, near Osaka. When not working on the development of the church, he was usually involved in the cause of world peace. Tokuchika Miki passed away on February 2, 1983.

At the time the first founder passed away, he was heard to say, “When I die this religion should spread all over the world. Therefore, my death is meaningful for world peace; it is not something to grieve or mourn over. Rather, after my death celebrate together with fireworks.” His son, the Second Founder acted on these words and created “The Art of PL Fireworks” as a means of honoring his father. It was not possible until some years after World War II that the goal of displaying the new fireworks art that had been developed. That initial display occurred in 1953 at Matsuyama City, the first fireworks display, was held, in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the passing of the First Founder. Beginning in 1954,

the annual Founder's ceremony was established at the new headquarters at Tondabayashi. Since then, the annual fireworks display has developed as a grand event for the residents of greater Osaka.

PL Kyodan see the fireworks display as a grand bouquet offered in remembrance of the first two founders of the church, and a symbol of the possibility of the soon realization of true world peace. The artistic celebration is, in addition, a manifestation of the first great truth of the church that "Life is Art."

The fireworks display opens with the present head of the church, Rev. Takahito Miki (b. 1957), thought of as the Third Founder, standing at the Main Temple's altar and offering the Rite of Blessing. As he completes the rite, the first burst fireworks light up the sky.

Now an integral part of the annual Founders' Day ceremony is the Peace Tower Ceremony. Rev. Miki leads the gathered membership in enshrining the spirits of all those who have died in war, without regard to their race, religion, or nationality, in the altar of the Peace Tower. The ceremony is designed to console those who have lost loved ones to war and pray for the everlasting peace of mankind.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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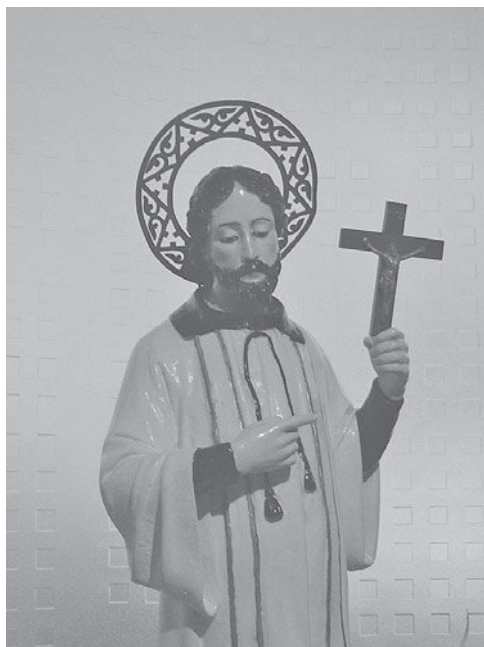
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Francis Xavier, Saint's Day of St. (December 3)

Francis Xavier (1506–1552), a prominent early Jesuit missionary who took the Christian message to India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Japan in the 16th century, was born Francisco de Jaso y Azpilicueta into a wealthy and aristocratic family in the Kingdom of Navarre (Spain). He became an early associate of Ignatius Loyola at the University of Paris, and he was one of the seven who joined together on Montmartre in 1534 to form the Society of Jesus. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1537.

The Jesuits emerged on the scene just as the Portuguese were developing their colonial empire. The king of Portugal requested Jesuit missionaries to assist in Portuguese territories beyond Africa, and Ignatius selected Francis to respond to the king's wish. Francis left Portugal in 1541 with two Jesuit companions and, after a stop in Mozambique, reached Goa, India, in 1542.

His primary assignment was to serve as a moral influence on the Portuguese colonists and sailors, but his real interest was in spreading Christianity among



This statue of Saint Francis sits in a church in Macau. Saint Francis serves as patron saint of Japan and Australia. (J. Gordon Melton)

the Asian population. He normally lived among the poorer people, and he spent much time ministering to the sick, even reaching out to the lepers. He was discouraged by his inability to improve the behavior of the Portuguese, and at one point he wrote asking that an Inquisition be set up. He would later be blamed for its excesses.

He was able to move on to Malaysia and Indonesia in 1545, and was able to make his way to Japan in 1549. He died trying to get to initiate work in China in 1552. His body was initially buried on Shangchuan Island, where he died. It was later temporarily buried in Saint Paul's Church in Malacca (1553), but several months later, the body was shipped to Goa, and placed in the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa. In 1637, it was placed in a glass container encased in a silver casket.

In 1614, Francis' right forearm was detached from his body and taken to Rome, where it was subsequently displayed in a silver reliquary at the main Jesuit church. Another of Xavier's arm bones was brought to Macau, where it was placed in a silver reliquary. The aim had been to take it to Japan, but due to the situation there, it has remained in Macau, and currently rests at Saint Joseph's Seminary.

Francis was beatified by Pope Paul V (r. 1605–1621) in 1619. He was then canonized by Pope Gregory XV (r. 1621–1623) in 1622, at the same time as his colleague Ignatius Loyola. He has been named the patron saint of Japan (where Roman Catholics are but a very small minority of the population) and Australia.

The Feast Day for Francis Xavier is December 3, and the church at Goa where his relics reside holds one of the larger annual festivals. There are multiple services, in the different languages spoken in the city. About once a decade, with the local bishop's approval, the casket with the relics is "exposed," that is, brought from their normal elevated position within the church to ground level.

From May 29 to June 12, 1949, the Catholic Church in Japan held a two-week celebration of the 400th anniversary of Francis Xavier's arrival in Japan.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anthony of Padua, Saint's Day of St.; Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St.; Dominic, Saint's Day of St.

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Fravardegan

Among Zoroastrians, the care for the dead forms an important core practice of believers. Traditionally, a body would be taken to a high tower where vultures are invited to dine. Once they clean the flesh away, the bones are left to dry in the wind and be bleached clean by the sun. The process has been largely abandoned, as urban sprawl has overtaken traditional places for the dead, and vultures have radically decreased in number. Today, many consider cremation, especially in the West. While changes affect the immediate care given the body of the deceased, the long-term attention that is due the dead is perpetuated. This attention is concentrated during the last 10 days of the Zoroastrian year calendar (the period known as Fravardegan. It includes the last five days of the month of Spendarmad plus the five days added to the annual calendar, the “Gathas,” named for a section of the Zoroastrian holy book, the Avesta.

It is believed that during the Fravardegan period, the *fravashis* of the righteous dead descend into the material realm from the spiritual to bless those who have remembered them and have kept them in their prayers. Zoroastrians believe that humans have both a soul, which they term the *nuwan*, and preexisting divine essence, the *fravashi*, a sort of ideal prototype of the individual. The *fravashi* is that part of the individual that ties him or her to God, Ahura Mazda. God creates the *fravashi* and sends it forth to do good. All things, even God and the supernatural beings, have their own *fravashi*.

During this season when the *fravashi* are especially near, a poetic prayer, the Fravardin Yasht, is used to invoke them. This prayer pictures the *fravashi* as cosmic forces that assume a high level of activity in nature 10 days before the vernal equinox (celebrated as New Year’s Day in the Zoroastrian community), and pass along their energy for the reparation, purification, and equilibrium of all created things.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fravardegan; Gahambar; Nowruz; Zarathustra, Commemorative Days of; Zoroastrianism.

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Freethinkers Day. See Thomas Paine Day

Freethought Day (October 12)

Freethought Day is an annual day of celebration that facilitates people who have become Freethinkers (atheists, Humanists, rationalists, etc.) but who have hesitated at telling family, friends, and/or colleagues at their work of their opinions a change to openly speak their mind and reveal to all their perspective. Among the oldest celebrations of Freethought Day has been held since the beginning of the 21st century in Sacramento, California, under the sponsorship of Atheists and Other Freethinkers of Sacramento and the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area. Sponsors believe that such events provide support for Humanists and atheists to open up to those with whom they associate on a regular basis.

October 12 was chosen as Freethought Day as on this day in 1692, William Phipps, the governor of Massachusetts, wrote the letter that effectively ended the Salem Witchcraft Trials. The trials had moved into a phase in which the major evidence being introduced was what was termed “spectral” evidence, that is, the unsupported and unverifiable reports of witnesses on what they saw and heard in the astral world. Based upon such evidence, people were being branded as witches working malevolent magic. Phipps was supported in his action by the opinion of several prominent Boston ministers and by his reaction to the growing hysteria that the trial was nurturing throughout the colony. His action was a step toward asserting rationality into an irrational situation that would lead to the discounting of spectral evidence and subsequently to widespread disbelief in its existence.

Freethinkers view the United States as a country with continuing widespread discrimination, hatred, and bias against freethinkers, and they see their efforts as assisting in changing that situation. Freethought organizations seek to become a community of support that allows Freethinkers to openly admit to themselves and others their beliefs, or lack thereof. Only in such a supportive environment can Freethinkers gain the voice they need to change their world for what they see is the betterment of all.

Along with Freethought Day, Freethinkers also have moved to have the second week of October named Freethought Week and the month of October Freethought Month. Among the things that Freethinkers are called to do is to provide support and become a mentor to a young Freethinker.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; HumanLight; Indivisible Day; National Day of Reason.

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Gahambars

The annual celebration of life in the Zoroastrian community is anchored by Nowruz, the New Year's Day, and six somewhat evenly placed season festivals that offer thanksgiving for the good things that God has supplied in the environment. The six festivals are termed gahambars, a term meaning roughly "fullness of time." Each gahambar honors one of the major aspects of creation—the heavens, water, earth/soil, plant life, animal life, and human life. The six gahambars are:

Gahambar Maidyozarem

Gahambar Maidyoshem

Gahambar Paitishahem

Gahambar Ayathrem

Gahambar Maidyarem

Gahambar Hamaspathmaedem

The gahambars are designed to offer praise and thanksgiving for God and creation, to reinforce community, to recall the rich Zoroastrian heritage, and to promote (*radih*) and truth (*rastih*).

The dating of the gahambars begins with Nowruz (New Year's), normally on March 21, the spring equinox. The Maidhyozarem Gahambar (focusing on heaven) begins on the 41st day after Nowruz. The second or Maidhyoshem Gahambar (with a focus on water), begins 60 days later. Another 75 days brings the Paitishhayem Gahambar (honoring the earth). Just 30 days later, the Ayathrem Gahambar calls attention to the flora and fauna and the prosperity they bring. The last two gahambars, the Maidhyarem and the Hanaspathmaedaem occurs an additional 80 and 75 days later, respectively.

By the end of the first millennium of the Common Era, the drifting of the day for celebrating Nowruz from the spring equinox and the resulting displacement of the gahambars from the season they represented was more than noticeable. Over succeeding centuries, it has led to a number to several calendar revisions, each of which only affected a portion of the whole community. Today, three different calendars are used by segments of the community, only one of which actually begins on the spring equinox. As a result, the gahambars are celebrated at different times by different Zoroastrians.

The gahambar is a five-day celebration. Each of the first four days is marked by a gathering at the temple in which liturgies are repeated. These liturgies open with

a blessing ceremony called Afrin, a prayer of remembrance of one's ancestors, which is followed by the Baj prayers that honor the angels and *fravashis* (the pre-existence essence of each creature). The main part of the liturgy is Yasna, which lead to the special prayers on the theme of the particular gahambar.

The gahambar culminates on the last day with a feast at which the blessings of the season are recalled and each participant is reminded of the seven duties to be performed by a good Zoroastrian, which includes leading a truthful life, the performance of good deeds, the remembrance of the deceased, and offering praise and thanksgiving to God.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fravardegan; Nowruz; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Zarathustra, Commemorative Days of; Zoroastrianism.

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Ganden Ngamcho. See Tsong Khapa Anniversary

Ganesh Chaturthi

Ganesh Chaturthi is a Hindu holiday that celebrates the birthday—really, the creation—of the deity Ganesh. There are a variety of tales related to Ganesh's birth. Possibly the best-known tale begins at a time when the god Shiva, who commonly dwelt on Mount Kailas, left his abode. While he was away, his wife Parvati desired an attendant who could protect her privacy while bathing and prevent incursions by unwanted personages who should appear at her front door. She decided to create a son who could perform such a task, and named him Vinayak. When Shiva returned, he did not recognize the new person in front of his home, and Vinayak did not recognize Shiva. Vinayak refused him entrance, and Shiva beheaded Vinayak with his trident.

Later, when he discovered what he had done, he sent some of his attendants into the nearby forest with instructions to bring him the head of the first living creature they encountered. That creature turned out to be an elephant. When they returned, he placed the elephant on the headless body of Vinayak and breathed life into him. Vinayak sprang to life and emerged as Ganesh, now recognized as the son of Parvati and Shiva.



Ceremony participants prepare to sink a large statue of Ganesh on the final day of Ganesh Chaturthi. It is a tradition of the holiday to return Ganesh to the water. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

Shiva then said that when people begin their worship, they should first worship Ganesh and dedicate to him all their future efforts. Such worship would ensure success and prevent failure. Thus, Ganesh emerged as the god of prosperity and good fortune, and the remover of obstacles.

Another tale of Ganesh's birth begins with Shiva slaying Aditya, the son of a sage. Shiva restored the boy's life, but failed to calm his enraged father Kashyapa, who cursed Shiva. He doomed Shiva's son to the loss of his head. The curse happened as Kashyapa had spoken. Shiva retrieved the head from an elephant owned by the god Indra to replace it.

A third tale has Parvati throwing her used bathwater into the Ganges River only to have it drunk by the elephant-headed goddess Malini. Malini subsequently became the mother of a baby that had four arms and five heads—all shaped like an elephant. The baby was claimed as her own by the river goddess Ganga, while Shiva asserted the claim of Parvati. He also removed four of the heads and then placed him on a throne as the "Controller of obstacles."

The multiplication of stories about him indicates the prominent place he began to assume in Hindu rituals, often being the first deity mentioned, and the place he came to have in most Hindu temples. An increasing number of temples were dedicated to him as the primary deity. Interestingly, in spite of the prominent place Ganesh had, public festivities were not a part of Hindu culture until relatively recently, not until the 19th century. There was an annual Ganesh festival, but it was usually held in homes or the several Ganesh temples.

Lokmanya Tilak (1856–1920) an ardent Indian nationalist and the first popular leader of the Indian independence movement, which sought to overthrow British colonial rule, struggled with various obstacles to his goal, one being the social chasm that existed between India's ruling Brahmin caste and the masses of people in the various lower castes. Through the 1890s, he began to suggest that the Ganesha Chaturthi celebration should be transformed into a national festival and become a tool facilitating a grassroots unity between Indian peoples. He saw Ganesh as a god for everyman. He had observed the Ganesha Chaturthi celebrations in Maharashtra and its capital Bombay (now Mumbai), where it had emerged as an important local festival. It would become an important festival across India through the first half of the 20th century.

Tilak was the first to promote large public images of Ganesh in outdoor tents, and he added the practice of creating many images of Ganesh, all of which were immersed on the 10th day of the festival. He viewed the festival as facilitating community participation and involvement in the 10 to 12 days of spiritual talks, dance, dramas, music, debates, and general festivities. The activities occasioned the coming together of people of all castes, at a time when large social and political gatherings were forbidden by the British.

Ganesha Chaturthi is celebrated during the month of Bhadrapad on the Hindu lunar calendar, starting on the fourth day of the waxing moon. The day usually falls in August or September on the Common Era calendar.

During the 10-day (12 days in Maharashtra) of activities, *aarathi* (worship centered on the offering of light from wicks soaked in ghee or camphor to a deity) is performed daily. Kumkum, turmeric, and saffron powder, used for social and religious markings, are thrown over the idol. Food is offered before the statues.

A main activity of the celebration is the creation of numerous statues of Ganesh, which become the focus of prayers for good fortunes and success in the coming year. The festival climaxes with the procession of the many images of Ganesh great and small to the local shoreline, where all the statues will be immersed in the water, with prayers that he will return to the place the next year. It is considered unholy to keep the image of Ganesh after this day.

In recent years, as the festival has grown in popularity, and as commercial interests have entered the statue-making market, a problem of pollution has arisen. The clay Ganesh statues used for many years were replaced with a variety of statues from nonbiodegradable materials, and their sheer quantity was a problem. Various cities have taken steps to promote an eco-friendly celebration relative to the immersion rituals and the materials being used in them.

Constance A. Jones

See also Janmashtami.

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Ganga Dussehra

The Ganges is India's most sacred body of water, especially in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal, through which it flows. The river originates in the Shivalik Mountains in the Himalayas, and the city of Rishikesh stands where it leaves the mountains to flow across the northern Indian plains. Immersing oneself in Ganges River water is possibly the most well-known practice of Hindus in the non-Hindu world.

Hindus tell a story of the river's origin. According to the legend, both of the two queens of King Sagara of ancient Ayodhya, Keshani and Sumati, were childless. To remedy the situation, Sagara performed a variety of severe austerities. Eventually, Keshani bore a son who was named Asmajas. Sumati, however, bore 60,000 sons. Sagara then performed a sacrifice intended to declare his kingly authority over the surrounding lands.

As a part of this declaration, a sacrificial horse was cut loose to wander into the lands over which he asserted his rulership. Any who challenged his rulership could capture the horse, amounting to a declaration of war. The ensuing battle would determine the rulership of the disputed land.

In this case, the sons of Sumati followed the horse, which found its way to a cave in which the sage Kapila meditated. They assume that he had captured the horse. They proceeded to disturb Kapila in his meditations. Extremely annoyed, he turned on Sagara's sons and pronounced a curse. They were all burned to death.

Several generations later, Bhagiratha, Sagara's great grandson, visited the site where the 60,000 had perished. He decided that he would perform some of the sacrificial offerings one commonly performed for one's ancestors, but that act required water, of which there was none. It seemed that another sage, attempting to destroy some demons who had taken refuge in the ocean, had drunk all the water so as to make the demons visible. That action had the effect of leaving the land in a state of drought.

Bhagiratha turned to Brahma, the Creator God, and asked him to end the drought. Brahma passed his request to Vishnu and suggested that the water flowing from his toe could be brought down to earth and solve the problem. Vishnu agreed, but also passed the request on to Shiva. The flow from Vishnu's toe was so strong that he feared that unabated, it would be destructive. Shiva thus agreed to allow the flow to pass through the thick head of hair on his head. Thus delayed, it would flow through the parched land and bring an end to the drought.



A man bathes in the Ganges River. The river is sacred to the Hindus, and bathing during Ganga Dussehra is considered to be particularly auspicious. (iStockPhoto)

Each year on Ganga Dussehra, Hindus gather along the Ganges banks, especially in Rishikesh, Hardwar, Varanasi, and the other towns along the river's path, to celebrate the Ganges coming to earth and to give thanks for her blessing. Those who cannot make it to the Ganges may bathe themselves with water taken from the river earlier, or immerse themselves in another pool of water while invoking the Ganges. Those who visit the Ganges will often take water from it with them to their home, where it will be kept for a variety of uses at a later date. It will, for example, be mixed with leaves of the tulsi plant and given to the dying in order to ease the separation of the soul from the body.

Dussehra means “that which takes away 10 sins.” The early bath on Ganga Dussehra is believed to relieve one of their sins. It is observed on the 10th day of the waxing moon in the month of Jyaishtha (May–June on the Common Era calendar). While any day is a good day for a bath in the river, Ganga Dussehra is one of the days that are believed to bring the most merit to the bather.

Constance A. Jones

See also Kartika Snan; Magha Purnima; Mauni Amavasya.

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Gangaur

Gangaur is an important Saivite Hindu festival celebrated primarily by the women of the Rajasthan state in India, though its observance is also found in the adjacent states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Gujarat. The focus of the celebration is Gauri, goddess of purity and posterity, another name for Parvati, the consort of the deity Shiva. The focus of the celebration is the affirmation of marital fidelity and bliss. It is a time for women to offer worship for the health, welfare, health, and longevity of their husband, and the happiness of their marriage. Unmarried women use this opportunity to ask for a worthy mate, and if found, to form engagements or even elope.

Gangaur begins on the first day of the month of Chaitra, New Year’s Day on the Indian civil calendar (March 21–22 on the Common Era calendar), but it is in itself not widely celebrated as a holiday. That day is also immediately after the conclusion of Holi, one of the most widely celebrated of Indian Hindu holidays. The Gangaur observance will continue for 18 days. There are a variety of fairs, called melas, that become the occasion for communal gathering, public entertainment, and the distribution of sweets.

One story told during the celebration of Gangaur comes from the *Sri Ramcharitra Manas* of the famed Indian poet Goswami Tulsidas. The youthful Sita finds her way to the shrine of Gauri and, after offering her puja worship, asks for a handsome and well-matched bridegroom. Her wish is subsequently fulfilled when Rama, an incarnation of the deity Vishnu, asks for her hand in marriage.

The most intense observance of Gangaur is by women who have married in the previous year. They will fast throughout the period and offer pujas daily. Unmarried women will join them and take only one meal a day through the entire 18 days. Older married women will observe the period with less intensity.

The most famous celebration initiating Gangaur occurs in the city of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. On the designated day, crowds will gather at the Tripolia Gate, the main entrance to the old city, and form a procession that will move through its streets accompanied by the town’s band. Other processions will move through the countryside visiting the many villages.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Ambuvachi; Dasain; Holi; New Year’s Day (India); Teej Festivals.

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Ganjitsu (Japan). See New Year's Day

Gathemangal

Gathemangal, or Ghanta Karna Chaturdasi, is a Hindu festival of Nepal that celebrates the exorcism of the demon Ghantakarna. The demon, named for the bells (*ghanta*) that hung from his ears (*karna*), troubled the residents of the Kathmandu Valley by stealing their children and women, demanding money, and generally acting like a bully. He made a noise as he moved about and was fearsome with his body painted red, black, and blue.

The solution to their problem came after the rainy season, when a number of frogs showed up and started to croak as they gathered around the demon. Their noise upset Ghantakarna, and he began to chase the frogs, trying to catch them. As he ran after them, they hopped into a swamp, and Ghantakarna followed them into the water. He soon found himself deep in mud, at which point the frogs turned and jumped on him, forcing him to sink into the depths of the swamp. In such a manner, the frogs saved the people from the demon.

The Nepalese celebrate Ghanta Karna Chaturdasi with a playful reenactment. With money collected from their neighbors, the children assemble materials to create an effigy of the demon, which is placed in a tentlike structure. Once the effigy is in place, one of the adults assumes the Ghantakarna persona by smearing himself with white paint and roaming the town collecting blessings. The event concludes with the children taking the effigy to the water's edge, where it will be consumed in flame.

Gathemangal is held each year on the trayodashi (13th day) of the month of Shrawan (July–August on the Common Era calendar).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Dasain; Mahashivaratri; Teej Festivals.

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Gaura Purnima

Gaura Purnima (a.k.a. Dol Purnima) celebrates the anniversary of the appearance day (birthday) of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), a Hindu teacher and

devotional exemplar who worked in what is now Bangladesh and the eastern Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa. He was born in Mayapur, West Bengal, and many Vaishnava Hindus believe him to have been an incarnation of the deity Krishna. He revived the practice of bhakti yoga (a form of practice centered on devotion to the deity, in this case to Krishna). Devotees spend much of their time reciting the Hare Krishna mantra, singing kirtans (holy songs), and in ecstatic dance. Chaitanya is most often pictured dancing and chanting in the open air. Vaishnava Hindus find the basis of their teachings in the popular Hindu texts, the Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavad Gita.

Chaitanya was born during the full moon (purnima) in the Indian month of Phalgun (February–March on the Common Era calendar). He was called the Golden One (gaura), hence his birthday came to be known as Gaura Purnima. He has become well known in the West due to the emergence of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Hare Krishna movement, in the 1970s. Members believe that Lord Caitanya was Krishna incarnate, and that he appeared as his own devotee, to demonstrate that individuals can gain enlightenment simply by chanting the holy names of the Lord in the Hare Krishna mantra.

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
 Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare,
 Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
 Rama Rama, Hare Hare

Festivities celebrating Chaitanya will occur in Vaishnava temples worldwide. Chaitanya was born at the time of the full moonrise, and devotees will fast during the day and then gather for an elaborate feast that is served at moonrise.

ISKCON has made Mayapur one of his primary centers of activity, and many Krishna devotees travel to West Bengal for Gaura Purnima. ISAKCON has turned the event into a monthlong celebration, with people coming to travel around where Chaitanya once lived. The movement's governing authority meets and festivities go on for several weeks until the actual Gaura Purnima day, which occurs at the same time as the popular national festival of India called Holi.

Gaura Purnima may, in fact, be thought of as the name under which Holi is celebrated in Bengal. For Vaishnava devotees, the highlight of the day will begin with the statues of Krishna and his associates being taken out of the temples. They then become the focus of elaborate processions/parades through the streets. Both the statue and the platform upon which Krishna is carried will be richly decorated with flowers and colored paper. Those accompanying the procession will shout out cries of victory ("Jai") and make noise with conch shells and trumpets.

Constance A. Jones

See also Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Appearance Day of; Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Appearance Day of; Holi; Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami; Radhashtami; Raksha Bandhan; Rama Navani.

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Genna (Christmas, Ethiopia; January 7)

In Ethiopia, where the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahdo Church includes slightly over half the population as members, Genna is celebrated on what is January 7 on the Common Era calendar. The Ethiopian calendar is a solar calendar of twelve 30-day months and an added month of five or six days) with New Year’s Day at the end of August. Christmas is thus celebrated on what is Tahsas 29 of the Ethiopian Calendar.

The Genna or Lidet celebration is preceded by a fast of 40 days. Fasting means that the observant eats only one meal each day, in the evening, and the meal is free of eggs, meat, or dairy products. The strict observance also excludes fish. The fast is broken with a feast on Christmas Eve, after which believers head to the local church for an evening prayer vigil. The church’s sanctuary is designed with three concentric circles, with separate areas designated for males and females. A choir is located in the outside circle. As the people enter on Christmas Eve, they receive a candle, which is lighted as they begin a circumambulation (three times) of the worship area. The people then take their position but will remain standing for the worship service that follows.

The Christmas feast has two main components: *injera*, a flat bread cooked by the heat of the sun, and *wat*, a stew made with highly spiced meat. The bread is used as the main utensil with which to eat the stew.

Ethiopians share gifts at Genna, but children are the only recipients. The presents are typically simple and utilitarian. After the meal, the children also play a game similar to field hockey, which is believed to be an activity in which the shepherds engaged following the announcement of Jesus’s birth by the angels (Luke 20).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Advent; Christmas; Ethiopian Church—Liturgical Year; Timkat.

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George, Feast Day of St. (April 23)

Saint George (c. 275–303 CE) is one of the most famous of saints, but at the same time, one about whom the least is known. It is believed by most that he was, in fact, a real person, a Christian who suffered martyrdom for his faith. It appears that he was born to a Christian family in Palestine and that his father was a Roman army official. His parents died when he was a teenager, and he joined the army. Given his father's reputation, Emperor Diocletian welcomed George. He rose to the rank of tribune. Then in 302, Diocletian began to move against the Christians, including those in the army. He had them arrested and demanded a Pagan sacrifice from them. In the midst of the persecution, George revealed himself as a Christian and tried to persuade Diocletian to stop his persecutions. Diocletian had him tortured and beheaded.

Over the centuries, a variety of legends were attached to George. The most famous concerned him killing a dragon. This legend appeared to have emerged among the Crusaders and was brought back to the West in the 11th century. In the story, a dragon made its nest near a spring and the local residents could not get water unless they could get the dragon to move, which they accomplished by offering it food—a sheep, or in the absence of any sheep, a young maiden. One day, as a maiden was about to go to her fate, George appeared, slew the dragon, and of course, saved the maiden.

The medieval legends of George seem to be traced to an apparition of him at the Crusaders' siege of in 1098, followed by a similar apparition at Jerusalem a year later. Then in 1190, both the city of London and England adopted the Saint George's flag, with a red cross on a white field, for their ships operating in the Mediterranean. This flag symbolized an agreement England made with Genoa (which had adopted Saint George as their patron) for the protection of their ships. The rising popularity of Saint George was further signaled in 1415 when the Western Church added him to their liturgical calendar assigning his feast day to an elevated status. Since that time, April 23, the traditional date associated with George's death, has remained, retaining some elevated status in the Tridentine liturgical calendar prepared by Pope Paul V (r. 1566–1572). It was significantly reduced in importance through the changes introduced successively by Pope Pius XII (1955), Pope John XXIII, (1960), and Pope Paul VI (1969), which left it as an optional "Memorial" feast day.

Meanwhile, Saint George's status survived the cleaning of the calendar that followed the Reformation in England, and is still commemorated annually in the various Anglican churches (including the Church of England) which include numerous parishes, schools, and organizations named for him. He also remains a popular saint in the various Eastern churches. Beside the April 23 date acknowledged by all of the churches, the Russian Orthodox Church celebrates two additional feasts honoring him: November 3 commemorates the consecration of Saint George's Cathedral in Lydda, dedicated in the fourth century. It houses the reputed



A painting depicting Saint George slaying the dragon hangs at Saint Barnabas Monastery in Cypress. (Steve Allen/Dreamstime.com)

relics of the saint. Then on November 26 (around 1054), the Church of Saint George was dedicated in Kiev.

Given George's status as a soldier/saint, he has become a popular patron saint. He has been named the patron saint of England, Portugal, Germany, and Malta as well as the former city states of Venice and Genoa. Saint George is also a patron saint of the nation of Georgia. There are hundreds of churches dedicated to him, and the Georgian Orthodox Church has two Saint George's days on its calendar: May 6 (equivalent to April 23 on the old calendar) and November 23. The November date is traced to Saint Nino, a fourth-century female saint venerated for bringing Christianity to Georgia. As was Saint George, she was from Cappadocia, and is believed

by many to have been a relative. He is also the patron saint of the Palestinian Christian community.

Among the more notable commemorations of Saint George are the annual parades in his honor in Bavaria. The events build on Saint George as the patron saint of horses and those who ride them. The day opens with the parish priest blessing the horses and their riders, which have previously marched around the church three times, by sprinkling holy water on them. The animals and their riders then join in a process to the local village.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Agnes, Feast Day of St.; Florian, Saint's Day of St.; Lucy, Saint's Day of St.; Nino, Saint's Day of St.

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Giant Lantern Festival (December)

Manuel Luis Quezón y Molina (1878–1944) was the first president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines (r. 1935–1944). During his presidency, he vacationed at Arayat, a city in the province of Pampanga, and his presence helped turn the area into a tourist site. In gratitude for the prosperity his presence brought, the city of San Fernando, the capital of Pampanga, decided to hold a festival in Quezón's honor.

In the 1920s, a resident of San Fernando, Francisco Estanislao created a five-pointed star lantern/ornament called a *parol*, as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem that led the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. The *parol* was a traditional artifact of Philippine culture, lanterns used to decorate the path to church being made of local materials during the Misa de Gallo Advent celebrations preceding Christmas. The new *parols*, shaped like large, round medallions decorated with a star design, were marketed, and sold quite well. Within a few years, especially after electric lights were initially added in 1931, the *parols* became more innovative in design and larger. Gradually, plastic became the primary construction material.

When the city decided to move ahead on an event honoring the president, they decided to hold a *parol* lantern contest. Quezón quickly got into the spirit of the celebration by personally contributing the prize for the winner and his wife, First Lady Aurora Aragon Quezón, personally presented the award.



A shopkeeper prepares lanterns for the Giant Lantern Festival in the Philippines. This festival occurs on the Sunday before Christmas and has grown more elaborate as modern technology helps to enhance lantern designs and size. (AP/Wide World Photos)

After World War II, which severely affected the Philippines, the celebration for the now-deceased president continued and became more elaborate even as the *parols* grew in size with variations that tested the limitations of the original star design. Recent entrants in the contest have reached 20 feet in diameter, with hundreds of blinking lights, moving parts, and very sophisticated lighting mechanisms. The decoration of the city with the lanterns has turned San Fernando into the Christmas capital of the islands, the place to visit during the season.

The festival is held on the Saturday before Christmas Eve (December 24), when the lanterns are carried through the streets in a giant evening parade, but the lanterns remain on display through the Christmas season.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Advent; Christmas; Epiphany; Misa de Gallo.

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Gita Jayanti

Gita Jayanti, the birthday of the Bhagavad Gita (the Song of God), is celebrated throughout India, especially by Vaishnava Hindus and others who admire it as sacred text. The celebration occurs on 11th day of the bright half of the month of Marga (December–January on the Common Era calendar). According to tradition, on this day, some 6,000 years ago, Sanjaya narrated the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna to King Dhritarashtra.

Sanjay, an advisor to the blind ruler, had been given the gift of seeing events at a distance (i.e., clairvoyance). The entire Bhagavad Gita is Sanjaya's report to Dhritarashtra of the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, as if he were standing next to them listening to it.

The Gita relates Krishna's advice to the charioteer Arjuna delivered on the battlefield prior to the start of the Kurukshetra war. That war, which pitted the closely related but feuding Kauravas and Pandavas families against each other, formed a key part of the much-longer Indian Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*. The two clans fought for hegemony in the legendary kingdom of Hastinapura.

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are prompted by Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma about fighting his own cousins. In explaining to Arjuna his duty as a warrior, Krishna places his role in the larger context of the eternal soul that wears different bodies as a person wears different clothes. Thus beginning with the teachings on karma and reincarnation and the duties imposed by caste, the Gita

offers a summary of Vaishnava Hindu teachings. As he speaks, Krishna also asserts identity as the Supreme Being and gives him a vision of His Divine form.

The Bhagavad Gita had inspired millions generation by generation through the centuries and led to a wide variety of teachings and theologies, each claiming it as its authority. Most Hindus would, however, agree in the book's sacred status.

There is no written record of the day when Sanjaya narrated the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna to King Dhritarashtra. However, the 11th day of the waxing moon in the Hindu lunar month of Magha has been designated as the day to especially celebrate the gita. The 11th day of each half of the month is always a fast day for Vaishnava Hindus, those most oriented on the deity Vishnu, of whom Krishna is an incarnation. To the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, represented in the West by the international Society for Krishna Consciousness, Krishna is the Supreme Godhead.

Constance A. Jones

See also Bhishma Ashtami; Govardhan Puja.

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God's Day

God's Day is one of the major holy days of the Unification Church, the new religious movement founded by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920) in 1954. God's Day was established on January 1, 1968. It is the fourth holy day begun by Moon, after Parents Day, Children's Day, and the Day of All Things.

Up until 2010, God's Day was celebrated on the first day of the solar calendar. The other Unification holy days were celebrated on the Korean lunar calendar, but in 2010, Moon decreed that the lunar calendar would be the standard for God's Day as well. For 2010, January 1 of the lunar calendar fell on February 14 of the solar calendar. The Korean lunar calendar is similar to the traditional Chinese calendar.

According to Moon, God's Day is a day of celebration of the fact that humanity has been rescued and children have been restored to parents and parents to God. All of this has been achieved through the work of Sun Myung Moon. He and his wife are the first True Children of God since Adam and Eve. They have restored

the fallen state of humanity and completed the mission of Jesus. Unificationists believe that Moon is Lord of the Second Advent, terminology for the fulfillment of the Second Coming of Christ.

God's Day was able to be established after Moon and his wife went through a seven-year stage of spiritual growth, beginning with their marriage in 1960. Moon stated: "As you know, the human fall came in the perfection level of the growth stage. Therefore the seven years Mother and I went through together was the period to cross the growth stage to the perfection stage, the period in which I would restore and install Parents Day, Children's Day, and the Day of All Things."

In one God's Day message, Moon declared: "Never before has God had the chance to fully manifest His love throughout history. God's Day gives Him the opportunity to show His love to His children. God has been suffering for so long, awaiting this opportunity. God has been desperately seeking the day when that love would be purified and returned to Him. Finally, that moment of restoration has come" (*The Tradition: Book One*).

As with all Unification holy days, members gather for an early morning celebration. Food and other gifts are offered to True Parents. Pledges are made and prayers are offered in the name of Rev. and Mrs. Moon. Testimonies are given about the positive impact that True Parents have made to the liberation of the universe and even to the liberation of God.

James A. Beverley

See also Children's Day; Day of All Things; Parents Day; True Parents' Birthday; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Good Friday

Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday, on which Christians remember the passion and death of Jesus. Following the sharing of the Passover meal on Thursday evening, Jesus went with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane just east of Jerusalem and, while there, was arrested. He subsequently was tortured, brought before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, and was ordered to be executed. He was ordered to drag the cross upon which he would be crucified from his place of imprisonment to the hill called Golgotha. There, he and two other men, who were convicted of thievery, were put to death. The Gospel of Mark described the events thusly:



Participants carry large crosses through the streets in celebration of Good Friday in Jerusalem on April 17, 2009. (Greg Gerber/Dreamstime.com)

And the soldiers led him away within the court, which is the Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and plating a crown of thorns, they put it on him; and they began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they smote his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off from him the purple, and put on him his garments. And they lead him out to crucify him.

And they compelled one passing by, Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to go with them, that he might bear his cross. And they brought him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And they crucified him, and parted his garments among them, casting lots upon them, what each should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. (Mark 15:16–25)

Jesus was crucified at about 9:00 a.m., according to the scriptural account. Mark later noted that at the sixth hour (noon), darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. Jesus died about 3:00 in the afternoon. He was subsequently taken down from the cross and buried. Pilate had the body released to a man named Joseph of Arimathea, who saw to its placement in a sepulcher not far from the crucifixion site. Most Christians believe the site of burial is a spot inside what is now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Others believe it to be a site uncovered

in 1883 by British general Charles George Gordon (1823–1885), a site that many saw as more closely conforming to the biblical account. Jesus would remain in the grave until early Sunday morning.

Most congregations of Christians worldwide gather on Good Friday, named for the good of salvation that came because of Jesus's suffering and death, to remember the events of the day. The means of remembering vary in the extreme, reflective of both theological differences and the widely variant patterns of worship. Some are highly liturgical, others wildly spontaneous, and with the open expression of emotions. Some are simple and somber, with readings of the appropriate texts from the New Testament. Sermons on this day often refer to the seven sentences that Jesus spoke during the hours on the cross. In medieval Europe, it became a time for penitential acts, participation in penitential processions being a popular form, the procession recalling Christ's carrying the cross to Golgotha. On the more extreme, flagellants would gather and beat themselves with whips. Possibly the most extreme have been the Penitentes, a group of believers in rural New Mexico and Colorado, who reenact the day complete with one of more members being nailed to a cross.

The somber mood of Good Friday carried through Saturday only to be broken by the celebration of the risen Christ on Easter. The transformation of moods is often evident in a midnight Mass on Saturday evening that begins in a mood of grieving and changes quickly to a celebration of the resurrection.

Kevin Quast

See also Easter; Holy Week; Maundy Thursday; Passover; Penitentes; Procession of Penitents.

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Good Remedy, Feast of Our Lady of (October 9)

By the 12th century, slavery was on the decline in Europe but was still relatively common and visible. Slaves were also commonly resold to buyers in the Middle East. The European slave market provided the context for the rise of a young man named John who, while studying for the priesthood in Paris, experienced a

vision that led him to dedicate his life to assisting captive Christians who had been sold into slavery. In that cause, he traveled to Rome in 1198, where he received initial approval for a new religious order that would honor the Christian deity as the Trinity and have as its main program the freeing of Christian slaves. This order was subsequently established near Paris, with a second monastery in Rome. It began to raise ransom money and, by 1201, was redeeming the first individuals from their slave state, many returning to France from Tunisia.

The Trinitarians' founder, now known as Saint John of Matha (1154–1213), proved quite successful in raising money and attributed his success in freeing slaves to the Blessed Virgin under the form of Our Lady of Good Remedy. In that form, she is often pictured as handing a bag of coins to Saint John.

The veneration of Our Lady of Good Remedy spread through the church as the work of the Trinitarians increased. They held a week of special devotions annually, and were joined by supporters. The main day of the week, October 8, was eventually placed on the annual calendar of days on which Catholics give special recognition to the Virgin. In 1961, Pope John XXIII declared Our Lady of Good Remedy to be the principal Patroness of the Order of the Holy Trinity.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Czestochowa, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Perpetual Help, Feast of our Lady of; Sorrows, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Govardhan Puja

Govardhan Puja is a celebration carried out by Vaishnava Hindus, mostly in northern India, on the day after the national Hindu-Indian holiday of Diwali. Govardhan is a hillock in Vrindavan, near where Krishna, the incarnation of the god Vishnu, grew up. Traditionally, the people of Vrindavan have worshipped Lord Indra as the god of heaven and of the rain. Krishna suggested that the worship to Indra was superfluous. It was not Indra who supplied the needed rain, but, suggested Krishna, they should honor Govardhan Hill instead, because it provided the grass upon which their cows and bulls grazed.

In his anger at the people following Krishna's suggestion, Lord Indra sent a deluge that threatened to submerge the region. When the people feared that the downpour resulted from their neglect of Indra, Krishna assured them that no harm

would befall them. He lifted Mount Govardhan and used it to shelter all from the rain. This event led Indra to accept the supremacy of Krishna.

In commemoration of the lifting of Mount Govardhan on this day each year across northern India, people build cow dung hillocks, decorate them with flowers, and venerate them.

Thousands of people will descend on Vrindavan for the celebration of the Govardhan Puja. Among the popular activities is the circumambulation of Mount Govardhan. Those who cannot make it to Vrindavan build replicas of the mountain, decorate them with flowers, and venerate them. If the weather permits, the hill is built outside and the group will process from the temple to their Govardhan hill and circumambulate it while dancing and chanting *kirtans* (sacred songs) in praise of Krishna. If the weather is bad, they will build a small hillock in the temple, and sing and dance inside.

Govardhan Puja is celebrated on the first day of the waxing moon during the lunar month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar). This day is also observed as Annakoot, a term meaning “mountain of food.” People will stay up the night before the celebration and cook 56 or 108 different types of food to be offered to Krishna. Especially in the temples in the region of Mathura, the land of Krishna, including Vrindavan, the day will start with Krishna, his consort Radha, and the other deities receiving a milk bath. They will be dressed in their finest clothes with ornaments encrusted with precious stones. Worship will include the offering of all the different foods that will become a mountain as they accumulate before the deities. As it is offered, the food becomes sacred food, *prasadam*, which the devotees will later consume.

Constance A. Jones

See also Bhishma Ashtami; Gita Jayanti.

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Great Buddha Festival (May 5)

The Great Buddha Festival (Dai-Butsu Sai) is an annual event of the Agon Shu, a Japanese Vajrayana Buddhist group with roots in Tibetan Buddhism. Seiyu Kiriyaama Kancho, the founder of Agon Shu, came to believe that the Agon (or Agama, in Sanskrit) sutras contained the original teachings concerning the path

to Buddhahood (enlightenment) and ultimate salvation as given by Buddha. The great Buddha festival takes place in front of the Buddha mega-statue located at the main temple of Agon Shu in Tokyo. The day of the festival, May 5, coincides with the national holiday in Japan known as Kodomo no Hi, one of two Japanese holidays called Children's Day in English.

Agon Shu members gather out of doors before the big statue to ask the Buddha to shower his blessings, compassion, and protection upon the people, and for the repose of the souls of the deceased. Much of the program is entertainment, with numerous performances by both professional and amateur musicians, dancers, and other entertainers. The event is a family affair, and Kodomo no Hi is recognized with prayers for the well-being and development of the children included in the program.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hoshi Matsuri; Kodomo no Hi; Tens of Thousands of Lanterns Ancestral Memorial Service.

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Great Full Moon Festival (Korea)

The Great Full Moon Festival is a traditional festival of Korea reflective of the continuing pre-Buddhist religion of Korea, which is held on the day and evening of the first full moon of the lunar New Year (late February, early March on the Common Era calendar). The traditional Korean calendar was based on the traditional Chinese calendar. In Korea, New Year's Day was a family affair, and small family celebrations were the order of the day. The first full moon, two weeks later, was the time for the larger community to gather and celebrate their hopes for the coming year and its growing season.

A key event of the New Moon Festival was the Burning of the Moon House. On a local high point, celebrants would construct a structure that resembled a house, but filled with branches of pine trees and other flammables more reminiscent of a bonfire. As the full moon rose, the first would be lit to welcome the moon, and as people watched the fire, they would pray for good fortune (especially relative to the annual harvest) and the prevention from evil. The custom is observed throughout South Korea, but is especially popular in the southern mountainous areas.

As the day of the celebration approaches, the young males of the community gather the fresh pine logs and branches for the Moon House. In some villages, the material to be burned will have been collected by the village farmers' music bands who will visit residents' home to perform. The building of the Moon House would be a collective happening at a site near the entrance to the village entrance, the site selected such that observers would have a good view of the rising moon, so



Moon houses burn during the Great Full Moon Festival in South Korea. (AP/Wide World Photos)

that all could see the rising full moon clearly. As it rose, attendees would shout for the ignition of the fire and the burning of the moon. Individuals joined the chorus with personal requests, especially those wishing for a child.

The burning would then become the subject of divinatory speculations. It is believed that a well-burnt Moon House portended a prosperous year. Some considered it an auspicious sign if the smoke was thick enough to cover the moon. The direction in which the Moon House finally collapsed was also indicative of future trends.

J. Gordon Melton

See also New Year's Day; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Gregorian Calendar. See Common Era Calendar

Gregory the Great, Saint's Day of St. (September 3)

Gregory the Great (540?-604), who served as a pope of the Roman Catholic Church from 590 to 604 CE, was the first pope with a monastic background. His intelligence and leadership qualities were recognized early in his life, and while

still in his 20s, he became a prefect of Rome. He came from a wealthy family who retired to an estate in Sicily during the war and turmoil in Rome in the 540s. It was after Justinian I (r. 525–565) drove the Goths, a process completed in 554, when the family returned to Rome, and Gregory began his early promising career. That career was cut short, however, by Gregory leaving his post in Rome, moving back to Sicily, becoming a Benedictine monk, and opening several monasteries on his estate.

He would then begin a second phase of his life as a confidant of the pope and would at the pope's request move to the East for six years, where he represented Rome to the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople. He is known in the East for the many writings that emerged out of this era. Upon his return to Rome, he became a Benedictine abbot.

At the age of 50, Gregory was elected pope. He had what would come to be recognized as brilliant papal career. He dealt with corruption and unworthy priests, he used the Church's money for a variety of contemporary social issues—the ransoming of prisoners, the care of the victims of the plague, and the protection of Jews. He organized monks to spearhead the conversion of the British Isles. He reformed the liturgy, though his role in revising the monastic chanting that bears his name is widely contested. He clearly understood his role as the most powerful ecclesiastical and political official in the bounds of the old Western Roman Empire.

In the centuries since his death, he came to be known as Gregory the Great, a title that derived from his being named a “doctor of the church,” a designation that placed him on an equal with the likes of Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome. He was canonized soon after his death, and is considered a saint by both the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. In 826, relics of Saint Gregory were given by Pope Eugene II (r. 824–826) to Hilduin, the abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Medard, at Soissons, France, on the occasion of the renovation and expansion of the abbey. They continue to reside there.

Prior to 1969, Gregory's feast day was March 12 (the date of his death), which generally fell during Lent. It was moved to September 3 (the day of his consecration as a bishop) by the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern churches continue to



Gregory the Great is considered one of the most influential leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, equal to that of Augustine. He served as pope from 590 to 604 and, during that time, worked to eliminate corruption throughout the church. (Library of Congress)

commemorate him on March 12. Gregory has had a special place in the British Church, having been responsible for the sending of Augustine of Canterbury and 40 monks to begin the conversion of England. He is considered one of the patron saints of England.

Gregory is honored by the Church of England on September 3 and by the Episcopal Church (in the United States) on March 12. He is also remembered in the liturgical year by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, also on March 12. In Belgium on the traditional day for Saint Gregory, school children have a holiday. They will march through the streets behind an adult dressed as Saint Gregory and they as little soldiers of Saint Gregory. The boys carry large baskets in which they receive candy and other good-tasting edibles.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Augustine of Canterbury, Saint's Day of St.; Lent.

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Grotto Day (July 25)

Grotto Day is a British holiday that grew from the celebration of Saint James the Greater and the popular pilgrimages to his reputed tomb site in northwest Spain. Saint James became identified with the scallop shell, the story being told of his saving a man as his body was taken to Spain following his martyrdom in the Holy Land. As the ship passed along the coast of Portugal, a man plunged into the sea. The saint saved him, but when he arose from the waters, he was covered in scallop or “cockle” shells. Pilgrims returning from Spain often had scallop shells they had acquired as souvenirs. At the height of the pilgrimage’s popularity, William Shakespeare included it as an element in his play, *All’s Well that Ends Well*.

While thousands flocked to Spain on pilgrimage, most people, of course, could not make the pilgrimage. In England, the practice developed of building temporary grottos made of shells of the scallop, or increasingly, the far-more-plentiful oyster. Christians unable to make the pilgrimage could easily visit a nearby grotto on the Saint’s day, July 25, or build a small grotto in their home.

As late as the 1920s, in the poorer parts of London, children collected oyster shells, bits of glass, colored stone, or pottery, and create a small “grotto.” They could place it on the street and kneel beside it with their caps turned into a receptacle for pennies. This custom disappeared along with the disappearance of a ready

supply of oysters. Londoners also visited the springs at Camberwell or Clerkenwell for dancing and general celebration and threw pennies into fountains they had ornamented with shells.

Grotto Day continues as a lesser summer holiday in England. In 1835, an ancient structure (of unknown origin) constructed of shells was discovered at Margate, in Kent, and was subsequently turned into a tourist attraction that was over the years identified with Grotto Day. Today, as the Margate Grotto, it sponsors a Grotto Day celebration complete with shell-oriented crafts for the children.

J. Gordon Melton

See also James the Greater, Feast Day of St.

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Ground Hog Day. See Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the

Guadalupe, Feast of Our Lady of (December 12)

The Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico emerged at the end of the 20th century as the most visited Roman Catholic pilgrimage destination in the Americas. On Friday and Saturday, December 11 and 12, 2009, more than six million people found their way to the site where in 1531, a young Juan Diego experienced an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has become the most ubiquitous image throughout Mexico, while a recent survey found that one out of every four respondents claimed that they had received a favor or a miracle, which they attributed to the intercession of the Virgin.

The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe begins in rural Spain, where a small village has lent its name to two important sites relative to devotion to the Virgin Mary. Around 1300, a cowherd named Gil Cordero had a vision of what he described as a young lady radiating light who directed him to a cave near his home, where he found a statue of the Virgin. This statue was later identified as one sent by the pope for the Cathedral of Seville in the sixth century. When the Muslims invaded Spain, the statue was hidden and knowledge of its location lost.

The statue was not returned to Seville. At the request of the Spanish king, a church was constructed at the cave where the statue, now called Our Lady of



The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Fe, New Mexico. (J. Gordon Melton)

Guadalupe, had been found. Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe spread throughout Spain and then to the Spanish lands in the Americas.

By the 1530s, Spain was engaged in a massive effort to establish Catholicism in place of the Aztec religion throughout Mexico. One old Aztec center was located at Tepeyac Hill, north of what is now Mexico City, where Spanish soldiers had recently destroyed a shrine to an Aztec goddess. On that very hill, as the story was recorded on December 9, 1531, a young man, named Juan Diego, had a vision of a woman surrounded by light and speaking to him in his native language. She instructed him to carry a message to the local Catholic bishop that he see to the building of a church on the hill. The bishop initially hesitated, as he wanted a sign to confirm the truth of what the young man told him.

Juan Diego requested the Virgin's help. He then gathered some roses (not generally blooming in December), which he wrapped in his robe, as a gift to the bishop. When he unwrapped the roses, on his robe was a picture of the woman who had originally spoken to him. About the same time, Diego's uncle reported that he, too, had seen the Virgin and received instructions that the image on the robe should be called the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The robe quickly became a popular object of veneration. The Spanish soldiers had heard of the Spanish Guadalupe, while many of the Mexicans saw the connection with the Aztec goddess of the hill. The new Mary devotion significantly

assisted the Catholic Church in redirecting allegiance away from the now-suppressed Aztec worship. Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe increased after she was credited with suppressing an outbreak of the plague in 1544 and then stopping a flood two years later.

Long-term trends in devotion was marked by the building of a large basilica on the site in 1709 and by her being named the patroness of Mexico in 1754, patroness of Latin America in 1910, and Mother of the Americas in 1961. Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) initially visited the shrine in 1979, three years after the dedication of the new cathedral church. He later beatified Juan Diego (1990) and returned to Mexico in 2000 to oversee the canonization ceremony for the new saint.

Through the 20th century, devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe has spread throughout Latin America and through the Mexican diaspora community in the United States, where its oldest shrine is found in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Copies of the image are ubiquitous throughout the Spanish-speaking community in North America, and have significantly permeated the English-speaking Catholic community. In the United States, new shrines replicating the one in Mexico City have been erected in several locations, and similar shrines are now found in Italy and Japan. The close proximity of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) with the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12) provides the Catholic faithful with rationale for a weeklong celebration of the Virgin.

Meanwhile, even as he was recognized as a saint, almost every aspect of the story of Juan Diego was called into question. Historians have pointed out the lack of any contemporaneous records of the apparitions and the miraculous cape. In his rather detailed account of his work in Mexico, Bishop Juan de Zumarraga, for example, made no mention of Juan Diego, and it would be 1648 before a written account of the apparition appeared.

Skeptics have suggested that the image is merely a very good painting done by a native craftsman around which a legend later adhered. In the 1980s, the image was subjected to a variety of tests, which disclosed several unusual features and found nothing to discredit its unique nature. While far from conclusive, the tests laid a foundation for future discussion of the image from a scientific perspective. The most interesting studies of the cape involved infrared photographs, which, when enhanced by computer, revealed a set of heretofore unknown images in the eyes of the Virgin.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of.

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Guan Yin, Renunciation of (September 19)

Guan Yin, also known as Kwan Yin, Kannon (Japan), and Chenrezig (Tibet), is the most ubiquitous deity figure in the world of Chinese religion in general and of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism in particular. She is often described as the female form of the Indian Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. At the beginning of the second millennium CE, Avalokitesvara was identified with the legend of Miao Shan, possibly of Taoist origins.

The story tells of King Miao Chuang, who prayed for a male heir but instead watched as three daughters were born to his wife. As they grew into their young adult years, he decided to marry each of them to a worthy man, and then choose one of the husbands as his heir. His plans were blocked by one daughter, Miao Shan, who informed her father that she did not wish to marry. Instead, she wanted to follow a path that would allow her to attain perfection and Buddhahood. She suggested that she wished to become a nun, but if she did marry, it would be to a physician, which would allow her a life aimed at healing all humanity of all its ills including lust, old age, and its many infirmities.

The king stripped her of her royal garland banished her to the Queen's Garden. Miao Shan thanked him. He later allowed her to retire to the Nunnery of the White Bird but instructed the nuns to treat her harshly and to try to dissuade her of her chosen path.

The king tried a number of actions in his continued attempts to convince his daughter to return to the palace, eventually executing her. Guan Yin later attained Buddhahood and as she was about to enter nirvana, responded to a cry of a person for help. She has since remained in the human realm, vowing not to enter the heavenly state until all had been released from suffering and attained enlightenment.

In the centuries since, the story of Miao Shan has been attached to the bodhisattva of compassion. She has become the focus of devotion, not unlike that surrounding the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Christian world. The story of Miao Shan has given her a biography which can be referenced in time and celebrated. Her refusal to marry and to become a nun instead has become known as her renunciation and is celebrated annually on November 7.

Putuo Shan, a mountainous island located off the coast of China in Zhejiang province, is the major center of the veneration of Guan Yin. Putuo Shan is also one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism. At the different site on the island, such as the South Putuo Temple, special ceremonies are held, and Buddhists pilgrims travel to burn joss (incense) sticks, venerate Guan Yin, and pray for health and wealth.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese Religion—Annual Cycle of Festivals; Guan Yin's Birthday; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin.

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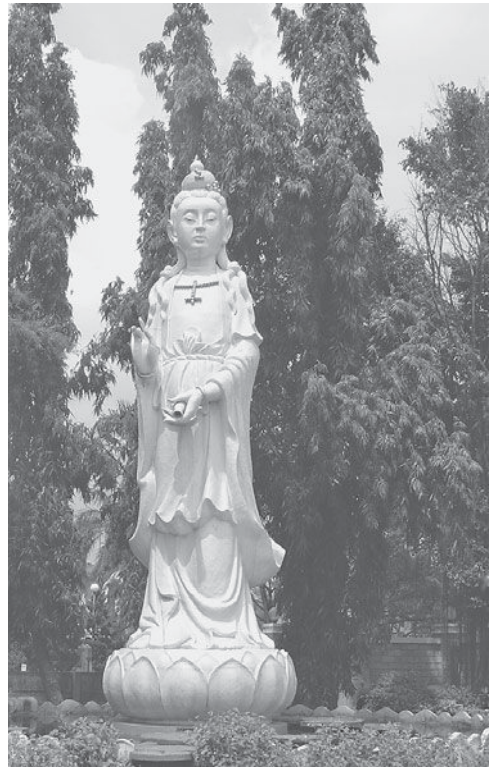
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Guan Yin's Birthday

Guan Yin (a.k.a. Kwan Yin, or in Japan as Kannon and in Tibet as Chenrezig) is one of the most ubiquitous presences in the world of Chinese religion and among Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists everywhere. Also known as Avalokitesvara (a male deity), Guan Yin is the goddess of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism. She also frequently graces the altar of traditional Chinese temples throughout China, where she is frequently compared to the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism.

The veneration/worship of Avalokitesvara emerged in China in the third century CE, where it became especially identified with the Pure Land sect, which offered members the goal of rebirth in the heavenly Western Paradise. Three bodhisattvas—Amitabha Buddha, Mahasthamaprapta, and Avalokitesvara—are central to Pure Land practice. As the lord of compassion, Avalokitesvara is seen as an emanation of Amitabha or Amida Buddha (the leader of Pure Land), and as the guard of the world in the time between the departure of the historical Buddha and the future appearance of the coming Buddha, Maitreya.

Guan Yin was introduced in the Lotus Sutra, a Buddhist writing that appeared in 406 CE. Through the next centuries, Kuan Yin would evolve as a female equated with Avalokitesvara. Vajrayana Buddhists (most identified with Tibet but also present in Mongolia and China) further popularized Guan Yin as a beautiful, white-robed



A statue of Guan Yin stands in a garden in Jakarta, Indonesia. (J. Gordon Melton)

goddess. She came to be known as the Perceiver of the World Sounds, that is, the cries of those who suffer. She works to relieve all suffering.

Several accounts are given of Guan Yin's origin, but the most popular relate to the story of Miao Shan, a seventh-century Chinese princess, who seems to be the source of the feminine representation of Guan Yin. Miao Shan's parents did not appreciate their daughter, who at an early age expressed an overriding concern to help others. They berated her and forced her to do menial tasks. They finally allowed her to go to a convent, but asked the nuns to mistreat her. Given the barren land in which the monastery was located, they were amazed at her ability to gather wood and tend a flourishing garden.

When the king heard about these miracles, he decided that he was going to kill Miao Shan. After all, the nuns were supposed to have tormented her. But as his henchmen arrived at the monastery, a spirit came out of a fog of clouds and carried her away to safety on a remote island. She lived there on her own for many years, pursuing a life of religious dedication. She was later in a position to give of herself to save her father. Only after traveling to the island to meet the person who had saved his life, did he realize it was Miao Shan and repented of his bad treatment of her. At that moment, the thousand arms of thousand eyes of Avalokitesvara appeared and Miao Shan disappeared.

As early as the seventh century, Buddhist monks visited Putuo Shan, an island off the coast of Zhejiang, east of Ningpo and south of Shanghai. Later settling there, they built temples and identified this island as the place where Miao Shan had lived and devoted her life to healing and to saving sailors from shipwreck. They spearheaded both the identification of the island with Guan Yin and the spread of the veneration of her through northern China.

Guan Yin has numerous manifestations. She is depicted in various forms and her hand posed with appropriated mudras. She almost always is clothed in a long flowing white robe or dress. She might be holding a rosary, a symbol of her devotion to Buddhism; the Lotus Sutra; a vase that pours compassion on to the world; or a willow branch. She is also seen as assisting barren women and is thus on occasion pictured, like the Virgin Mary, with a child in her arms.

Guan Yin's birthday is celebrated on the 19th day of the second lunar month, usually in March on the Common Era calendar. It is a day for pilgrimages and events at the several temples and shrines in the island, but throughout the Mahayana and Vajrayana world, it is acknowledged. In addition to her birthday, Guan Yin is saluted on two other days: her enlightenment day on the 19th day of the sixth lunar month (June), and her renunciation day—when she became a nun—on the 19th day of the ninth lunar month (September).

Guan Yin temples may now be found around the world. Prominent examples include the Kannon temples in northern Tokyo and in Kamakura, Japan; the temple on Waterloo Street in Singapore; Kek Lok Si Temple in Penang, Malaysia; and the Kuan Yin Temple in Honolulu, Hawaii, one of the oldest functioning Buddhist temples in the United States.

Through the centuries, Buddhists have also shown a particular penchant for erecting large statues of Buddha and the Buddhist bodhisattvas. Currently, the largest such statue is one of Guan Yin located at Sanya in Hainan Province of the People's Republic of China. Completed in 2005, it stands 108 meters (354 feet). (In contrast, the Statue of Liberty stands at a mere 151 feet.) The Guan Yin statue also eclipses the largest Buddha statue located at Ushiku, Japan (100 meters) not to mention the well-known Buddha of Kamakura, a mere 11 meters.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin, Renunciation of; Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday; Samantabhadra's Birthday.

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Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday

Guru Gobind Singh was the 10th guru (teacher) acknowledged as the leader of the Sikh community, and the one who held up the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, as his successor guru. Thus, Gobind Singh was the last living guru acknowledged by the Sikh community. The birthday celebrations allows for special acknowledgment of his role in shaping the Sikh community. The most important Sikh holidays are *gurpurbs*, or festivals occasioned by birthday or martyrdom of one of the 10 gurus, and this is no exception.

Guru Gobind Singh was born the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Patna Sahib, in the state of Bihar, India, on December 22, 1666 (on the Gregorian calendar). He was raised at Annadpur, a Punjabi city founded by his father and now a Sikh holy site. He emerged to adulthood at a time of great stress within the Sikh community, which was suffering abuse by the Muslim ruler under which they lived. He articulated a principle later known as Kshatradharma, a form of spiritual practice that values the "protection of the seekers and destruction of the evildoers." This principle fit a militant response to discriminatory and persecutory actions. On several occasions, Gobind Singh led forces and won battles in defense of the community.

The principle of Kshatradharma would lead him in 1699 to the organization of the Khalsa, the Order of the Pure, a military-religious fraternity originally consisting of those men who acknowledged their willingness to give their life for the guru. The khalsa later expanded to include all within the Sikh community, formally entered by baptism, the adoption of the name Singh (lion) or in the case of

women, the name Kuar (princesses). Sikhs give Guru Gobind Singh credit for turning the tide against Mughal oppression in India.

Along with his military and organizational accomplishments, Sikhs also point to his intellectual activity, which included authoring a number of treatises concerning what might be termed the Khalsa spirit. His writings would later be collected into a separate volume, the Dasam Granth, which is revered second only to the Guru Granth Sahib by Sikhs.

The guru's birthday is now celebrated on what is January 5 on the Common Era calendar, which is the 23rd day of the month of Poh on the new Sikh Nakanshahi calendar. Members of the community celebrate by gathering at the gurdwara (a Sikh house of worship) for special programs remembering Gobind Singh's life.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Arjan; Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

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Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the

The Guru Granth Sahib (also known as the Adi Sri Granth Sahib Ji) is the scripture of the Sikh community, and is treated with the same, if not more, respect as that accorded the Bible by Christians and the Qu'ran by Muslims. Sikhs consider it not only their holy book, but their living guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib began with the founder of the movement, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who composed a number of hymns and prayers that were collected, sung, and recited by his companions. His successors as head of the Sikh community also composed hymns, which would be collected in books called *pothis*. Paralleling the work of Nanak and his successors were others who also composed hymns, poems, and prayers following Guru Nanak's format. Over time, it became increasingly difficult to separate the highly valued writings of the Sikh gurus from those of their imitators. The fifth guru, Arjun Dev (1563–1606), assumed the task of assembling an authentic collection of the writings of his own and his predecessors that could be presented to the community as an authoritative text. He also added material from some 36 Hindus and Muslims to the collection.

Guru Arjun left some blank pages in what now emerged as the Granth. The 10th guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), filled in these pages primarily with the hymns of

his immediate predecessor, Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675). Before his passing, Guru Gobind Singh suggested to the community that they treat the Granth Sahib as their next Guru.

The respect paid the Guru Granth Sahib is seen in its placement in the gurdwara, the Sikh worship hall. It is placed on platform in the front of the gathered community. It is covered with fine piece of cloth, and rests under a canopy, which is decorated in attractively colored materials.

The annual celebration of the Guru Granth Sahib commemorates its installation in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, the lead temple of the community. The Adi Granth as first assembled by Arjun Dev, was completed in 1604, and installed in the Golden Temple at that time. That event is now celebrated on September 1 (the 17th day of the month of Bhadon). However, a more important event that is celebrated annually is the second installation of what was the complete Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh, and the declaration of its status as the new guru, which occurred on October 20, 1708. On the new Nanakshahi calendar, that event is now celebrated annually on October 20 (the sixth day of the Sikh month of Katik).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Calendars, Religious; Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Arjan; Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

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Guru Parab. *See* Nanak's Birthday, Guru

Guru Purnima

Guru Purnima is the annual day when Hindus show special veneration to their spiritual teacher, their guru. It is observed on the day of the full moon (purnima) in the Hindu lunar month of Ashadh (June–July on the Common Era calendar). Primary honor on this date is given to an acknowledgment of the legendary Bhagwan Ved Vyasa, the first guru, who in Hindu lore is credited with compiling all the Vedic hymns available at the time, dividing them into four parts based on their ritual use. He is also credited with writing the 18 Puranas and the great epic of India, the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* dates to the third century BCE, with parts that may be as old as the ninth century BCE. The Puranas date to the third to fifth century CE. Nevertheless, Vyasa supplies the original image of what a guru is and should be.

Besides the first gurus, there have been many spiritual teachers through history and many exist today. Thus, Guru Purnima becomes the occasion of especially honoring one personal guru in the present. Many Hindus believe that every



A ceramic tile displays the image of the Indian philosopher Shankara and his guru. (J. Gordon Melton)

spiritual aspirant needs a teacher who can dispel darkness and guide him or her to spiritual enlightenment. On this day, the aspirant should serve and worship the guru (vyasa puja), and speak of their life and teachings. One pattern for observing Guru Purnima is to meditate on the guru and chant his prayers; perform worship of the guru's feet; attend satsang (a gathering) in which discourse extols the glory of devotion to the guru; fasting; and prayer. The day ends as the devotee renews their resolve to make future spiritual progress.

It has become a common practice in some Hindu circles to have a special day of guru worship on the birthday (day of physical appearance) of the guru and to commemorate that day (Vyasa Puja) annually by issuing a book that will include pictures of the guru, excerpts of teachings, and accounts of his or her life.

Constance A. Jones

See also Gaura Purnima; Kartika Purnima; Magha Purnima; Sai Baba of Shirdi, Birthday of.

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Gyana Panchami

Gyana Panchami (also known as Knowledge Day) is a Jain holy day that occurs on the fifth day of the Indian month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar). Jains will gather at their temples to hear readings from the Jain scriptures and to worship them for the knowledge they brought to the people.

The teachings of Jainism's founder Mahavira (as was the case of the saints who preceded him) were not written down but, like Buddha's teachings, were committed to the memory of his closest disciples and passed orally from generation to generation by the acharyas (gurus) who imparted the knowledge from them to the disciples.

The period of strictly oral transmission lasted for multiple centuries. In addition, as time passed, different acharyas also created and passed on commentaries on the various topics important to the Jain faith. Simultaneously, they raised the issues of the injection of errors into the memory stream and the failure to pass on some material that had been lost. Thus, the decision was made and approved to begin committing the scriptures to writing. As the two major divisions of the community (Digambar and Svetambar) came into existence, they differed on their reception of the spectrum of written texts.

The primary Jain holy books are Agamas, believed to be the texts of the discourses (45 in number) of Mahavera. These were written down in Prakrit, an early Indian language initially known from its usage by the Buddhist ruler Ahsoka in the third century BCE. Other Jain literature that expands upon the Agamas and major themes in Jain thought were written by others. The Agamas are the main focus of Gyana Panchami. Among the prominent Agamas is the Akaranga Sutra, which outlines rules for Jain monks, including the steps that monks should take to avoid harming other living beings. Also valued by Jains is the Kalpa Sutra, considered a most sacred text because it includes a lengthy biography of Mahavira and sketches of the lives of the other Tirthankaras.

Constance A. Jones

See also Akshay Tritiya; Diwali; Kartika Purnima; Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Hadaka Matsuri

A Hadaka Matsuri, or naked festival, is a type of Japanese Shinto *matsuri*, which takes its name from the minimum clothing worn by most participants. The essence of the festival is the action of a group of men, in the hundreds or even thousands, who spend a period of time in the cold and then compete for a symbolic prize in what becomes a test of their male fortitude. Such festivals are held at various locations throughout Japan in January and February. The largest and oldest such festival is held on January 13 at the Konomiya shrine in the city of Inazawa, in Aichi prefecture on the south-central coast of Honshu, where some 10,000 men in loin-cloths and wooden sandals, strive to touch the *Shin-otoko*, a naked man chosen to act as a scapegoat, and divest the community of all evil and bad luck.

The origins of the festivals are traced to the eighth century, when in 767, Emperor Shotoku (574–622) ordered all the kokubun-ji (regional temples) across Japan to offer invocations to dispel plagues. In obedience to the order, the local governor visited the Konomiya shrine to drive away evil spirits and calamities. The modern Hadaka Matsuris are rituals designed to drive off calamities, in the belief that the *Shin-otoko* around whom the ritual is built has the power to receive and carry away the evil of all the men who make contact with him.

It is considered an honor to be selected as the *Shin-otoko* for this particular Hadaka Matsuri. The man so selected must prepare himself with a lengthy purification process that includes shaving all of his body hair.

The other male participants prepare themselves by consuming large amounts of sake, and stripping down to a loincloth. At Inazawa, the *Shin-otoko* must walk a route through the street where the other men, dressed only in loincloths and sandals, are vying to touch him in order to pass to him their sins and bad luck. He will spend the better part of the day in their company as he makes his way to the Shinto shrine, where he will pay his respect to the enshrined deities and finally is allowed to dress and make his way quietly out of the city, hopefully carrying all the negativity with him.

As the *Shin-otoko* approaches, special bodyguards who keep order will splash freezing water over the participants as they get close to the *Shin-otoko*. The men keep warm by jumping and moving during the whole event. The climax of the festival occurs as all the men congregate inside the main shrine where at exactly midnight, two pieces of wood called *shingi* are dropped into their midst. The two men who catch these, it is believed, will have a year of good luck.

In Tokyo, at the Teppozu Inari Shrine, men gather to submerge themselves in a pool of cold water and then prostrate themselves against huge blocks of ice while praying for good health and their family's safety during the coming year. In the northern city of Sendai, men celebrate the *Dontosai* festival by marching several kilometers through the streets to the Osaki Hachiman Shrine. Their goal is a blessing for good luck in the New Year delivered by the shrine's presiding priest.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Onbashira; Sakura Matsuri.

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Haile Selassie I, Birthday of Emperor (July 23)

Emperor Haile Selassie I (1892–1975) was the emperor of Ethiopia (r. 1930–1974) for almost half a century. He was born into a family that had ruled the country for centuries and believed that it could trace its family lineage to Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the queen of Sheba. The ascension of Haile Selassie to the emperor's chair in Ethiopia was seen by some on the island of Jamaica as the fulfillment of a prophecy of one of their notables, Marcus Garvey (1887–1940). In the second decade of the 20th century, Garvey had emerged as a spokesperson for black pride. He called people of African heritage living in the Americas to unite, and in the process is reported to have alerted some of his supporters to the future crowning of a black king, for he would be the redeemer of black people in the New World.

When in 1930, Haile Selassie was crowned emperor of Ethiopia, the news found its way to Jamaica, and some remembered Garvey's prediction. The fulfillment of what appeared to be a prophecy became integral to the emergence of the new nationalist movement called Rastafarianism. In the slums of Kingston, four ministers—Joseph Hibbert, Archibald Dunkley, Robert Hinds, and, most prominently, Leonard Howell—saw the new emperor as the completion of biblical prophecies such as those in Revelation 5:2–5 and 19:16 that refer to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the King of Kings. Independently of each other, the four

began to proclaim Haile Selassie the Messiah of the black people. The Rastafarian movement really began when the four discovered each other. The movement took its name from the emperor's pre-coronation name, Ras (Prince) Tafari, and emerged as a diverse, decentralized movement through which Jamaicans articulated opposition to white racism, and to interpret the Bible in a way that affirmed the central role of black people in divine history. They became known for the marijuana they smoked and the long hair they grew in imitation of a lion's mane.

Rastafarians saw Haile Selassie as their leader even though he did nothing to encourage them. Their theology increasingly gave him divine attributes, a view that was set up by his formal title as emperor, "His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and Elect of God." Rastafarians tracked his movement, listened to his speeches, and interpreted his movements. Their faith was not shaken either by his exile following Mussolini's invasion of his country in 1936, or his loss of his throne in 1974 when a coup removed him from office.

Today, Haile Selassie continues to be worshipped by Rastafarians. Many do not accept that he died in 1975, as reported, but that he entered a monastery from which he will emerge at some point and liberate his followers and vanquish all evil.

Haile Selassie was born on July 23, 1892. Rastafarians now celebrate his birthday as a holy day. At the same time, given the highly individualized nature of Rastafarian life, celebrations will take very divergent paths in different places. Some hold what are termed Nyabingi sessions (which include music, chanting, and prayer). A number of professional singers have created a popular form of Rastafarian music, called reggae music, and Haile Selassie's birthday is a popular time for concerts and related musical events.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.

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Hajj

One of the goals of any pious male Muslim is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, at least once in his life. This pilgrimage is seen as a symbol of life as it should be lived in both this world and the next. It brings into focus Allah's

sovereignty, human servanthood, and the role of devotion to Allah as the keynote of one's life. That pilgrimage, called the Hajj, should be made in the second week of the last month (called Dhu al-Hijjah) of the Muslim year, 70 days after the fast of Ramadan. That date changes annually, as the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar that does not attempt to reconcile with the solar year. Women may (and many do) make the Hajj, but to do so, they must be accompanied by their husband, father, or other close male relative.

The pilgrimage celebrates three events, the forgiveness and reunion of Adam and Eve, Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail, and the obedience of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims trace the history of the Hajj, however, to Ibrahim (Abraham in the Jewish Bible), who was, with his son Ismail, entrusted with building the Kaaba ("House of God") at Mecca. It is believed that Ibrahim made an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, but that over the centuries after his death, Mecca degenerated into a pagan center.

Undoubtedly, by the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the Kaaba had become a site for the acknowledgment of the many deities of the various groups of Arabia. In reestablishing Islam, Muhammad is credited with smashing the idols and establishing the Kaaba as a center for the worship of Allah alone. In announcing the Hajj, he saw himself as the instrument for reinstating the proper worship once followed by Ibrahim. Some of the rules of the Hajj developed from proscriptions of practices, such as walking naked around the Kaaba, which had accumulated at the site over the pre-Islamic centuries.

The immense growth of Islam and the spread of its adherents around the world had required a number of adjustments to the format of the Hajj. From the middle of the 19th century, the number of people who annually make the journey has jumped from fewer than 10,000 to more than two million. A primary change has come with the improvement of transportation to Mecca proper. What used to take weeks or months can now be done in a few hours. In recent decades, the Saudi government has moved to supervise the Hajj. It has seen to the erection of a number of service facilities for the pilgrims, many created in response to problems from previous pilgrimages.

The pilgrimage has several distinct phases. First, prospective pilgrims announce their intention to their home community. They then make the necessary arrangements to travel to Mecca and plan for the maintenance of those in their care during their absence. Future pilgrims should also ideally pay any debts and right any wrongs as part of the spiritual and moral preparation to participate in the sacred journey. Once the trip begins, the first goal is a spot just outside the sacred land where a station, called a *miqat*, is to be found. There, they again state their intention to make the pilgrimage. At this point, the males don a white robe, the *ihram*, a white seamless garment made up of two pieces of cloth. One piece covers the body from waist to ankle, while the other is thrown over the shoulder. For the duration of the pilgrimage, there are a number of rules that govern the individual, who will refrain from sexual intercourse, the wearing of jewelry, the cutting of hair or nails, or the shedding of blood, among others.

For most pilgrims, the next stage of their journey is the *umra*, or little pilgrimage. This part of the pilgrimage may or may not be done in connection with the Hajj proper. The *umra* begins with a visit to the great mosque, al-Masjid al-Haram. The Kaaba, a cube-like structure that is believed to lie directly beneath a similar heavenly structure, is located within the mosque. Upon arriving at the mosque, pilgrims march around the Kaaba in a counterclockwise direction seven times. Each time they pass the black stone that protrudes from the Kaaba, they recite a brief prayer, “In the name of Allah, and Allah is supreme.” They also attempt to actually reach the Kaaba and kiss it, but this is impossible for most people given the contemporary crowds. Instead, they make a gesture of kissing it.

The next destination is a pair of hills not far from the mosque. Here they move seven times between the two hills, symbolically reenacting Hagar searching for water for Ismail after being abandoned by Ibrahim (at Allah’s command). This activity, the *sa’y*, had sometimes been a dangerous activity, and many pilgrims have died here as the crowds move quickly between the two hills. After the *sa’y*, the pilgrims move to a well about 100 yards from the mosque, where Hagar was supposed to have finally found the water for Ismail. They drink the water and often take some home to share.

At this point, the crowd symbolically reenacts events from Muhammad’s “Farewell Pilgrimage” of 632. On the first day, pilgrims move some five miles outside Mecca to the plain of Mina. After a night in a tent, they travel to the Plain of Arafat (often by bus), where they pray at the site where Muhammad delivered his farewell sermon. He spoke from Jabal al-Rahmah (Mount Mercy) and presented a program of reform in the religious, economic, social, and political realms. At the mount, pilgrims will stand for many hours reading the Qur’an and reciting repeatedly a brief prayer. This standing, termed the *wuquf*, is considered by many the central occurrence of the Hajj, an act of complete surrender to Allah.

After sunset, the pilgrims move as quickly as possible to Muzdalifah, where two more prayers are said. The quick movement is to reenact Muhammad’s flight. Upon their arrival and after the prayer, the men and women separate. The men stay in Muzdalifah while the women return to Mina.

At the beginning of the next day (the third day of the pilgrimage), everyone gathers 49 small stones. Seven of these will be thrown at three pillars located in Mina later that day. These pillars mark a spot where Satan appeared to Ibrahim. At the end of this third day, the Hajj is officially over.

Although the Hajj has officially ended, most pilgrims will extend their stay. The Hajj is immediately followed by the feasting of Id al-Adha. The shrine at Mecca was rebuilt by Ibrahim to commemorate the dream he had when he was told to sacrifice his son Ismail to God. In the end, Ibrahim instead sacrificed a ram to Allah. Through the next days animals (primarily goats and lambs) will be sacrificed and consumed. After eating, the men will shave their heads, cut their nails, bathe, and put on fresh clothes. Women will cut three symbolic hairs and put on new

clothes. During the next two days, the remaining stones will be thrown at the three pillars in Mina, seven at each stone on each day. The pilgrims now return to Mecca and once again walk around the Kaaba. The time spent on the plain of Arafat and the subsequent movement around the Kaaba are considered the two pillars upon which the pilgrimage has been built.

On their way home, pilgrims might visit other sites associated with Muhammad, especially Medina, where Muhammad was buried. After completing the pilgrimage, they may add the word “Hajji” to their name.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir’ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara’ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Hala Shashti

Hala Shashti celebrates the birth of Balarama, the elder brother of Lord Krishna. Krishna is seen as an incarnation of the deity Vishnu, while Balarama is viewed as the incarnation of Adishesha, the coiled serpent upon whom Vishnu rests. One legend suggests that at one point, Vishnu chose two hairs, one white and one dark. From the former, he created Balarama, and from the dark one, Krishna.

Both took human form as the children of a couple, Vasudeva and Devaki. Devaki was the sister of the evil king Kamsa, who lived with a prediction that he would be killed by the eighth son of Devaki. As he learned of her bearing children, he had her and Vasudeva imprisoned. Her seventh child was miraculously transferred from Devaki’s womb to the womb of another woman, Rohini. Rohini gave birth to Balarama and raised him. Krishna, the eighth child was secretly taken out of the prison cell and raised by his foster parents, Yasoda and Nanda in Gokula, a town in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

According to the stories of Balarama in the *Mahabharata*, he taught both Duryodhana of the Kaurava family and Bhishma of the Pandava family how to fight. When war erupted between the two families, Balarama remained neutral. Eventually, Bhishma defeated Duryodhana and killed him.

Most of his adventures were in connection with Krishna, and after Krishna departed the earthly phase of his existence, Balarama entered a meditative state and also departed from this world. In some stories, a great white snake left his mouth, a reference to his identification with at this point in reference to his identity as Adishesha. The place at which he died is said to be not far from the Somnath Temple (a Saivite rather than a Vaishnava worship site) in western Gujarat.

Balarama is generally pictured as fair skinned relative to Krishna, who will be with dark blue or even black skin. He is often depicted with one of his two weapons, the *hala* (plough) or the *gadā* (mace). Traditionally, Balarama wears blue garments and a garland of forest flowers. His hair will be tied in a topknot, and he will be adorned with earrings, bracelets, and armlets.

Hala Shashti took its name from the *hala* or plough, Balarama's main weapon. Vaishnava Hindus celebrate it on the sixth day of the waning moon of the lunar month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar). It is the only commemoration to focus on the contributions of Balarama to Krishna's career.

Observation of Hala Shashti includes a fast. Believers refrain from consuming food grown in the fields as well as milk or curd derived from the cow. Interestingly, buffalo milk can be consumed. The fast is directed to several ends—happiness and prosperity in this life and the longevity of one's children. It is most popularly observed in the rural areas of northern India.

Constance A. Jones

See also Bhishma Ashtami; Gita Jayanti.

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Halloween (October 31)

A secularized Halloween has emerged in the 21st century as one of the most popularly celebrated holidays in the United States. As presently celebrated, it has become a parody of ancient holidays observed in a strong belief in the communication of the living with the dead and the need to propitiate the dead to assure that they did not interfere in malicious or even harmful ways.

Halloween can be traced to the ancient Pagan Celtic holy day of Samhain, and the belief that on that day, the veil that divides the living from the dead was pushed away and that the spirits of the dead roamed the earth. Rites were held, the exact



Six children in costume wait for candy at a woman's door on Halloween. Halloween is a popular secular holiday, with only a few symbols of its Pagan roots remaining. (Monkey Business Images/Dreamstime)

nature of which are little known, to keep the dead and the effects of their return at bay. It also became a time to remember and honor the recent dead. In 835, Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–844) moved the church's celebration of all the saints (martyrs) who had not risen in prominence to have a special day dedicated to them from May 13 to November 1. At the time, days were still thought of as beginning as night fell the evening before. Thus, the evening of what is now thought of as October 31, All Saints Eve or Halloween, became a time in which a Christianized version of Samhain could be celebrated. The community could gather around a bonfire, and a spectrum of Pagan activities (bobbing for apples, trick or treating) could be continued long after their significance was forgotten.

Through the 19th and 20th centuries, the belief in spirits and the horror at the malevolent power they could wield dropped significantly. Pagan magical practitioners, the witches, once genuinely feared, became the fodder of horror novels and humor, the result of people losing their belief in the existence of magic. Halloween could be reinvented as a time for children to play dress-up and beg candy from neighbors, and an additional excuse for adult parties, especially for those who enjoyed costume parties and acting out as someone else.

As Halloween has grown in popularity in a country in which the great majority of people are members of Christian churches, a few very conservative Christian groups aware of its roots have denounced it as a Pagan celebration which should be eschewed by Christians. At the same time, members of a new revived Pagan

movement have reinvented the holiday of Samhain, which they celebrate as an alternative to Halloween. For modern Pagans, the day has also lost its element of fear and become a time to commune with the dead rather than propitiate malevolent spirits.

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Saints Day; All Souls Day; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice.

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Hana Matsuri (April 8)

Hana Matsuri is the Japanese celebration of the birth of Gautama Buddha, the son of the Sakyas, a royal family of a tiny kingdom located at the base of the Himalayas in what is now northern India. Buddhist holy books recount that as the time for his birth approached, his mother, Queen Maya, traveled from Kapilavasthu, the capital city, to her childhood home in Devadaha, where it was intended the child would be born. On the way, however, the queen's entourage passed Lumbini Grove, at the moment full of giant sala trees adorned with their spring blossoms. Queen Maya stopped and entered the grove to enjoy its beauty. Reaching up to touch the blossoms proved the occasion of her son coming forth. Mother and child were showered with blossoms, and two streams of water from the sky bathed them. Then the infant Buddha stood up, took seven steps, and proclaimed his status in a sentence various translated into English as "I alone am the World-Honored One!" or "I am my own lord throughout Heaven and Earth!"

The ritual celebration of *kambutse*, or anointing of the statue of the Buddha, in Japan appears to have been observed as early as 606 CE at Genkoji Temple in Yamato prefecture, during the lifetime of Prince Shotoku (574–622 CE), a significant early force in the spread of Buddhism throughout the country after its arrival from Korea. The Japanese came to emphasize the role of the flowers in the birth story, and in Japan, the time for the *kambutse* ceremony came to be popularly referred to as Hana Matsuri, the "Flower Festival."

Each year, on April 8, memorial services are performed at temples throughout Japan. Buddhists construct small buildings decorated with flowers, and a baby Buddhist statue (called a *tanjobustu*) is set within. The statue is of an infant

standing erect with his right hand pointing skyward. It will be placed on a tray. Worshipers approach the small house in a prayerful attitude, offering supplications to be separated from evil, to cultivate goodness, and participate in the salvation of all. They will then sprinkle the statue with hydrangea tea (called ama-cha), which some may subsequently take home and drink as a holy beverage. (A variation of this ceremony, with perfume or other substances substituted for the tea, is performed throughout a large part of the Buddhist world.) Flowers adorn the miniature buildings.

Additional Hana Matsuri activities might include communal dances, dramatic performances, and processions. In some places, the baby Buddha statue will be carried about the town by flower-decked worshipers, a practice that suggests some Shinto influence. Temples may hold extra worship services built around the public reading of Buddhist sutras (scriptures). Notable celebrations of Hana Matsuri at which Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike gather are staged at temples like Hoganji (Kyoto), Todaji (Nara), and Sensoji, Zojoji, Gokokuji, and Jindaiji (all in Tokyo).

While the Japanese celebrate Buddha's birthday on Hama Matsuri, most Buddhists believe that the birth, the day of enlightenment (at the age of 35), and death (in his 80s) of Gautama Buddha occurred on the same day of the year. That day, usually called Wesak, was the night of the full moon of the Hindu month of Vaisakha, (usually in May on the Common Era calendar). Tibetans call this day Sakya Dawa.

Japanese Buddhists hold their commemorations of those three events on separate days. His enlightenment is celebrated on December 8 (Bodhi Day), and his death is commemorated on February 15 (Nehan).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bodhi Day; Nehan; Sakya Dawa Festival; Wesak/Vesak.

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Hanshi Festival. See Pure Brightness Festival

Hanukkah

Hanukkah (or Chanukah), sometimes referred to as the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day holiday recalling the events of the Maccabean Revolt, the reclaiming



Three children spin *dreidels* and count coins next to a lighted menorah during Hanukkah.
(PictureQuest)

of hegemony over the Temple at Jerusalem, and a reliving of the celebration that followed. These events occurred in the second century BCE, when Judea as part of the Seleucid Empire, one of several empires which arose following the death of Alexander the Great and the subsequent breakup of his great empire. During the second century, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE) emerged as the Seleucid ruler.

Much of the regime of Antiochus IV was taken up with efforts to assert control over Egypt, which were blocked by the Roman Empire in 168. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, the high priesthood had become embroiled in corruption, as Antiochus began appointing to the office those who bribed him. When a dispossessed Jewish high priest seized the moment, raised an army, and attacked the city of Jerusalem, Menelaus, the high priest Antiochus had chosen, fled the city. In return, Antiochus moved on Jerusalem and, in 167, restored Menelaus and then massacred many Jews. He then decided to go further and incorporate the Jews into the Hellenic world. He successively looted the temple, outlawed the Jewish religion, and ordered the worship of Zeus as the supreme god. To enforce his orders, he had an altar to Zeus erected in the Temple upon which pigs were sacrificed. This desecration of the Temple was later termed the “abomination of desolation.”

Antiochus’s actions, especially relative to the temple, galvanized many to fight against Seleucid rule, and provoked a large-scale revolt originally led by Mattathias

(d. c. 166 BCE) and his five sons, the most famous among them being Judah the Hammer or Yehuda HaMakabi (Maccabee). In 164, the Maccabees succeeded in recapturing the Temple; they then purified it and rededicated it. The Maccabees called for an eight-day celebration to commemorate the re-consecration of the Temple. This story is retold in the apocryphal First Book of Maccabees.

Missing from the oldest account of the story of the Temple restoration is any mention of a miraculous occurrence that reputedly accompanied this initial celebration. It seems that the olive oil needed to keep the lamp in the Temple lighted was lacking. Only enough for one day was available. In spite of the lack of oil, the lamp in the Temple was kept burning for eight days—equal to the time required for a fresh batch of olive oil to be prepared. At a later date, the leaders of the community instituted Hanukkah to commemorate the miracle that occurred during the original celebration of the rededication of the temple.

Several explanations of the events following the Maccabean Revolt have been offered. Some have suggested that the eight-day celebration was in fact the holding of the festivals of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) and Shemini Atzeret, for their proper celebrations had not been possible during the years of the revolt. These two holy days combined take eight days.

Modern scholarship on the Maccabean era has suggested that what propelled Antiochus to introduce the decrees outlawing Judaism was not Hellenistic zeal, but rather a determination to quash an internal provincial civil war. These scholars focus on the fighting in Jerusalem among the followers of the various claimants to the high priesthood. Since the Temple and Judaism seemed to lie at the center of the civil war, Antiochus subsequently decided to extirpate Judaism and demand that the Jews adapt Greek culture and religion.

Modern Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration starting on the 25th day of the month of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar, which places it in late November or December on the Common Era calendar. There is a story told in the Second Book of Maccabees concerning the relighting of the altar fire by Nehemiah as the result of a miracle that had occurred on Kislev 25. This event from an earlier era appears to be the reason Judah Maccabees selected Kislev as the day for the rededication of the altar in 165 BCE.

Observance is carried out through a set of rituals performed each day of the eight days. Most are family-based and occur around the evening meal, the most important being the lighting of the candles soon after nightfall. On the first night, a single light is lit, that number increasing by one each of the eight nights. The Hanukkah *menorah* has room for nine candles; the ninth, the *shamash* or guardian candle, should be higher than the others and is used to light the other candles. As the candles are lit, specific blessings over the lights and remembering God's miracles are said.

Other objects closely associated with Hanukkah are the *dreidel*, a four-sided spinning top that is used in a game that children play on the holiday. Also, it is customary to eat foods fried in oil on the holiday. These include potato pancakes called *latkes* and jelly donuts.

In the modern West, Hanukkah has become a time of gift giving. The custom may be dated from 17th-century Poland, when children were given money to pass on to their teachers. Eventually, money was given to the children to keep for themselves. While most Hanukkah money was and remains in the form of small coins, Hanukkah in the modern world serves as the occasion for larger monetary gifts. Hanukkah also seems to have been the inspiration for chocolate companies to create coin-shaped chocolate covered in gold or silver foil.

In the late 20th century, Hanukkah has been increasingly seen as one of a set of winter-season holidays that have absorbed elements of the secular side of Christmas, especially its gift giving. For some, it has become an occasion to give, especially to children, a gift on each night of the holiday. The eight days of Hanukkah are official holidays in Israel.



A fully lit menorah sits on a table during the final night of Hanukkah. (PictureQuest)

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See also Christmas; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); HumanLight; Purim; Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah; Sukkot.

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Hanuman Jayanti

Hanuman Jayanti is a Hindu holiday that celebrates the birth of Hanuman, the popular deity who appears as a monkey. Actually, he is of the *vanara*, the race of

ape-like humanoids who play a prominent role in the Indian epic *Ramayana*. The vanara were created by the gods to assist the deity Rama in his battle against the demon Ravana. They possess strength, and a spectrum of godly traits. Hanuman led the vanara in the fight against Ravana.

Hanuman is said to have been born to Anjana, a vanara who prior to her birth on earth was a celestial being. Several places lay claim to be the spot of Hanuman's birth. The several stories about Anjana and Kesari, her husband, describe them as devotees of Shiva and Hanuman as a product of that devotion.

The fifth book in the *Ramayana* is primarily concerned with the many adventures of Hanuman. They tell of his strong devotion, especially to Rama and Sita, his strength, his magical powers, and his ability to subdue evil spirits. He is often pictured having ripped open his chest to show a picture of Rama and Sita, the deities he carries in his heart.

Hanuman temples are found in most towns of any size throughout India. Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated during the Hindu lunar month of Chaitra (March–April), the exact day varying in different areas. The most distinct celebrations occur in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, in southernmost India, where the Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated in the lunar month of Margazhi (December–January). Wherever it is celebrated, however, on the selected day, spiritual talks will be given in Hindu temples (and not limited to those especially dedicated to the deity). These talks will begin early in the morning. Hanuman was reputedly born at sunrise, and at this moment, the talks will be paused while sacred food (Prasad) will be distributed among those at the temple.

Among the stories about Hanuman, at one point he observed Sita applying sindhur (the unique mark found on the foreheads of most Indian women) to her head. Hanuman inquired into the rationale for it, and Sita indicated that it would ensure a long life for her husband (Rama). Hanuman then took the material and smeared it over his entire body, an act aimed at ensuring Rama's immortality. In remembrance of this account, devotees visit Hanuman temples and apply sindhur from the Hanuman statues to their foreheads. Devotees expect this act to bring them good fortune.

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See also Ashokashtami; Monkey King, Birthday of the.

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Harikuyo (February 8, December 8)

Harikuyo is a Shinto memorial service held on February 8 (or in some locations on December 8) to honor seamstresses and those (mostly women) who sew. Women will take a day away from their sewing to visit the local shrine. They will take their old and broken needles and stick them into cakes of tofu or *konnyaku* (made from the konjac plant). They will offer prayers for the rest and repose of the needles, for the improvement of their sewing skills, and for the prevention any injuries that might be incurred while sewing.

This practice seems to have become popular in the 18th century, though it is based on ancient beliefs that many objects, like people, have souls, and that memorial services are thus appropriate for items like needles that most people to-day would think of as inanimate. In this case, the objects have been extremely important to the people's livelihood.

Among the popular sites for Harikuyo celebrations is the Wakamiya Hachimansha Shrine in Nagoya, Japan. The practice of Hari-kuyohas been traced to the Awashima Shrine in Wakayama, otherwise known as a shrine dedicated to the gods of the sea.

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See also Neri-kuyo.

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Hari-Shayani Ekadashi

Hari-Shayani Ekadashi is a fast day of particular significance to Vaishnava Hindus. The 12 months of the Indian Hindu lunar calendar is divided into halves relative to the waxing and waning moon. The 11th day of the 24 half-months is considered by Vaishnava Hindus as a day for fasting and offering puja worship to Lord Vishnu in the local temple. In the month of Ashadha (July–August on the Common Era calendar), it occurs at the beginning of the Indian rainy season. Vaishnavas describe this time as the moment that Lord Hari (i.e., Vishnu) retires to rest on top of the serpent Adishesha, in Ksheersagar, the cosmic Ocean of Milk. Here he will rest for the next four months.

This day is especially celebrated in Maharashtra, where Vishnu is worshipped as Vithoba. Vithoba is the central deity for a monotheistic form of Hinduism, the

Varkari sect, which has a main temple at Pandharpur, on the Bhima River in south-east Maharashtra. According to the local legends, Vithoba's devotee Pundalik brought the deity to Pandharpur, Shayani Ekadashi is one of two major festivals for the Maharashtra Vasihtnanvas. It is coupled with the Prabodhini Ekadashi that ends the rainy season in the month of Kartika.

On Hari Shayani Ekadashi, a huge religious procession (including pilgrims from across Maharashtra) will make its way to Pandharpur. Pilgrims (called *war-karis*) from different locations will have carried palaquins of different Maharashtra saints, most notably the pilgrims from Alandi and Dehu who will carry pictures of the poet-saints Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram, respectively. As they travel, they will sing a set of chants (*abhagas*) praising Vishnu/Vithoba.

During the period beginning with the Hari-Shayani Ekadashi, termed "Chaturmas," a variety of normal activities are frowned upon, including getting married and the sacred thread ceremony, the Upanayanaa, a rite-of-passage ritual for boys, to mark the point at which they begin their formal education.

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See also Amalaka Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Kartika Snan; Mokshada Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Haritalika Teej. See Teej Festivals

Hariyali Teej. See Teej Festivals

Haru Matsuri

Haru Matsuri is a type of festival held in the Shinto shrines of Japan to honor the gods during the spring which in Japan begins with the traditional New Year's Day (in early February), Setsuban, and continues into May. It is a time when farmers are preparing the land and planting crops, especially rice. Early in the spring season, the major Haru festival, also called *toshigoi no matsuri*, is observed, with the focus of prayers to the *kami* being for a good harvest and for the safety of the nation. This festival will have its mirror in the harvest festivals in the fall.

As the country has urbanized (and secularized), the haru festivals have been broadened to include more general prayers for well-being and made to encompass urban concerns such as business prosperity and success in school examinations (which, at various stages in one's education have significant effects upon career choices).

In the United States, a popular version of Haru Matsuri is held annually in Morgan Hill, California, which has become a Japanese cultural festival aimed at relating Japanese Americans to the larger community and celebrating the end of the more egregious forms of discrimination that Japanese Americans suffered during the first half of the 20th century. It features expositions of Taiko drumming. Similar adaptations of the festival are found throughout the Japanese diaspora, though it tends to take second place to the more popular Sakura Matsuri or Cherry Blossom Festival.

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See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri; Setsubun.

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Higan

Higan is a Japanese Buddhist holiday observed by most of the groups representative of the different Buddhist traditions in the country. It is celebrated twice annually in the spring and autumn for a week beginning on the spring (March 18–19) and fall (September 20–21) equinoxes. The celebration of Higan is traced to the early Heian period (794–1190), and even earlier to the time of Prince Shotoku (574–622), the patron of Buddhism as it made its initial thrusts into Japan.

The word higan, a shorten form of "tohigan," literally means "to arrive on the Other Shore," the "other shore" in this case being enlightenment, or what the Buddhists call Nirvana. Enlightenment is reached by cutting through illusion and the distortions it brings to one's life, transcending the need for reincarnating again and again, and arriving at Truth. The various schools of Buddhism have slightly different interpretations as to the best method to reach enlightenment and the steps necessary. Higan provides the opportunity to pause and examine one's progress toward enlightenment.

The word "higan" is also a translation of the Sanskrit word "paramita," and thus relates the path of enlightenment with the Six Paramitas, the basic behavioral guidelines that facilitate the movement across the river from this life of suffering

to Nirvana: practicing Charity, Morality, Patience, Right Effort, Right Meditation, and Right Wisdom.

Higan is also a time to consider one's ancestors. During Higan, people will visit graves and think about those who have died, especially those who have passed away in the last year. Along with Oban in August, the two equinoxes are the time especially to show respect for the dead. Also associated with the fall Higan is the Higanbana flower, a beautiful red flower that grows wild across the country but which is known to possess a highly poisonous bulb. They actually were planted adjacent to rice fields to keep rodents away.

For Nichiren Buddhists, the Higan ceremony is seen as an opportunity for accumulating benefits and amassing virtue for both the believer and deceased loved ones. At the equinoxes, day and night hours are equal, a symbol of the inseparability of darkness (ying) and light (yang), and the oneness of good and evil. As the Buddhist way is the "Middle Way," the benefits of performing positive deeds on the equinox is seen a superior to one performed at other times. Higan thus presents an exceptional opportunity to arrive at the "other shore." For Nichiren Buddhists, the Higan observance includes a memorial service for one's departed ancestors.

The spring and fall equinoxes were made national holidays during the Meiji era (1868–1912), and were designated as *koreisai*, the festival for the imperial ancestors. In 1948, they were secularized as the spring and autumn equinoxes, but remained a national holiday in Japan.

Higan has one source in a much older holiday (eighth century) called Shunk-korei-sai, when at the spring equinox, the imperial family honored and worshiped their Imperial ancestors, which included the major Shinto deities Amaterasu and her grandson, Ninigi-no-mikoto.

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See also Fall Equinox; Obon Festival(s); Pure Brightness Festival; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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High Holy Days (Jewish). See **Days of Awe**

■ Hinduism

Hinduism has become a global religion in the 20th century. For millennia restricted to the Indian subcontinent, Hindus currently reside in some 150 countries. The universal outreach has not been only geographical. Rather, the modern reinterpretation of Hindu ideas and practices has paved the way to attracting converts and sympathizers beyond the Indian people. As during the classical epoch of Hinduism, the modern epoch continues to be prosperous and dynamic in bringing forth new forms, ideas, and practices of Hindu ideas and devotion.

“Hinduism”: A Problematic Term

The term “Hinduism” is a Western construction invented in the early 19th century by British colonial administrators and orientalists. The construction and usage of the notion is built on a differentiation, current in the subcontinent, previously altering its meaning according to European understanding. Persian conquerors of the late sixth century BCE used the word *Hindu*, a Persian variant of Sanskrit *sindhu*, to denote both the region and the people living nearby and beyond the Indus River (the region of today’s Pakistan). Muslim rulers, who invaded North India beginning in the eighth century, took over the term and used it to demarcate Muslims from their non-Muslim Indian subjects. The Muslims’ exclusive term “Hindu” was then adopted by 18th-century European orientalists and administrators in an altered mode. Since all people of the subcontinent were conceived of as followers of the one so-called heathen religion, the term “Hindoo” subsequently replaced the previous notion of “Gentoo” (heathens, from Latin *gentiles*, Portuguese *gentio*). Thus, all different Indian religious traditions—except Islam—prevalent in the 19th-century British Raj came under the heading of “Hindoo.” From this, the abstraction “Hinduism” was derived, and first used in English in 1829.

Since then, the notion of “Hinduism” suggests a coherent religion to be found all over India. The construction fails to convey, however, the apparent diversity and heterogeneity that it both subsumes and ignores. Related to the empirical situation in the subcontinent (and now also, overseas), in contrast, it would rather be more appropriate to speak of a number of distinct but related religious



An Indian guru meditates. Although the beliefs originating in India are lumped together under the banner of Hinduism, there are many variations of belief and practice. (Corel)

traditions or religions existing side by side within so-called Hinduism. The encompassing of diverse regional religious traditions under the one heading of Hinduism has stirred up both academic and practical problems of communal and national representation. The same terminological problematic applies to the designation “Hindu,” as a person is not a “Hindu in general” but rather a “Hindu in particular”—for example, a Gujarati Vaishnava or Tamil Shaivaite, placing emphasis on specific deities, sacred texts, ways of worship (*puja*), religious teachers, and so on.

Hindus seldom use the notion “Hinduism” as a self-description, using as an alternative a term of their own—*sanatana dharma* (perennial or eternal faith). This term remains elitist, in particular as it is applied more to philosophical interpretations of the diverse Hindu traditions than to the multifarious local manifestations of practice and faith.

Main Historical Epochs

The approximately 3,000-year-long history of Veda-based traditions, or Hinduism, will be subdivided in five broad epochs, highlighting main developments and changes. (The bibliography provides references to topics and voices that deserve a fuller treatment than is possible here, in particular with regard to women, Dalits [so-called untouchables], the veneration of goddesses, worship, and the performing arts.)

The Harappa Culture

Early 20th-century archaeological excavations made known the existence of large towns, such as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, with some 40,000 inhabitants each, on the banks of the Indus River. It is assumed that these towns already existed in the first half of the third millennium BCE. This Indus Valley civilization, also designated as Harappa culture, knew the art of writing, evidenced in carved seals. The people built impressive houses of brick supplemented by a drainage system. The script has still not been deciphered, and thus the many archaeological findings are subject to contrasting interpretations and speculation. Speculations also abound in the religious sphere. Evidence suggests cults of fire and fertility, but it is not yet clear whether the many female figures excavated relate to the veneration of a mother goddess or are mainly paraphernalia for fertility rites. Seals seem to have been used like protective amulets.

Epoch of the Veda or Brahmanism

According to established theory (though challenged recently), Indo-European people known as the Aryans (Skt., *arya*, noble, honorable) invaded the northwestern plains of the Indian subcontinent during the first half of the second millennium BCE. It is not yet known for certain whether this incursion of the Aryans destroyed the Harappa culture or whether the civilization had come to an end because of ecological catastrophes (droughts). The Indo-European immigrants settled down near the river Sindhu (Indus) and subsequently went on to reach the Ganges River regions. Their language was an Indo-European tongue that developed into Vedic Sanskrit and later into classical Sanskrit. From those early days, Sanskrit has been



The city of Mohenjo-Daro, along with the city of Harappa, was at the center of the ancient Indus River valley civilization. (Yousaf Fayyaz/Fotolia)

the exclusive, sacred language of Vedic Brahmanism and Hinduism. Sanskrit texts, some of them more than 3,000 years old, provide ample evidence of the religious ideas, rituals, and culture of the Aryan people. The texts form a huge corpus of scripts that developed over a period of several centuries. These hymns and manuals on ritual and philosophy had previously been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and were written down between 1200 and 500 BCE. The collection of texts is called Veda from the Sanskrit root *vid* (knowledge). The Veda is spiritually audible, meaning that ancient seers (*rishi*) saw or “heard” the knowledge thanks to their superior intuition. Collectively, the four text groups of the Veda are called *shruti* (that which was heard). This knowledge is timeless, not subject to change. It is of nonhuman origin; it was not invented or composed by the seers.

The Veda consists of four collections, each divided into four sections. The collections are the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva; the sections in each of these collections are Samhita (hymnic compositions), Brahmana (ritual treatises), Aranyaka (forest books), and Upanishad (sitting near [the teacher], philosophical treatises). The stated sequence is roughly in chronological order, the Rig Veda Samhita being the earliest text (written down around 1200 BCE) and the Upanishads being the latest (composed from 800 to 500 BCE). The Veda is primarily a liturgical text, being used in the ritual honoring of the deities. The central religious practice was the sacrifice (Skt., *homa*, *yajna*), in which the ritual specialist, the brahmana (also

known as brahmin and brahman) propitiated the gods. Sacrificial ingredients were milk; ghee or purified butter; curds; various grains; and the *soma* plant. Also, domestic animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, or horses were offered by way of ritual slaughter. The substances offered would be given into the fire and, through this, transported to the deities (the *deva* invoked). Most important was the correct recitation of the hymns and *mantras* (sounds, verbal formulas); only the priest was eligible to perform these rituals. The Aryans primarily worshipped Agni, the fire god; Soma, a hallucinogenic plant; Varuna, the custodian of the “law” or cosmic order (*rita*); and Indra, the warrior god. According to the texts and the Brahmins, these rituals were essential and indispensable to sustain the cosmic homology—that is, the correlation of the cosmos and man’s position in it.

In the course of time, the priestly Brahmins came to dominate the religious practice and to establish their ritual monopoly. The kings also were especially in need of rites to legitimize and stabilize their power. The dominant position of the Brahmins, undisputed until the middle of the first millennium BCE, provides valid ground to call this Vedic epoch the time of the Brahmins, or Brahminism. The early texts also outlined the fourfold classification of Vedic society along general social strata into which a person was born (Skt., *varna*). According to Rig Veda 10.90,12, the four varnas are the brahmana, or priest; the *Kshatriya*, or warrior and ruler; the *vaishya*, or farmer, trader, and commoner; and the *shudra*, or serf. The classification was straightforward and exclusive, based on ritual purity. A change of one’s varna and thus one’s social status was not possible. The first three classes were called the twice-born, due to a special ritual ceremony. The male members of those varnas underwent the initiation ceremony called *upanayana*, receiving the sacred thread. The girl’s equivalent to the upanayana ceremony was a rite during a girl’s first menstruation, performed especially for Brahmin daughters. During the epic epoch and subsequent centuries, this rough classification along varnas subdifferentiated along manyfold *jatis*—that is, specific occupational and residential so-called castes into which a person was born.

The youngest group of texts, the Upanishads, comprise the “end of the Veda” (*vedanta*). In these texts, the change from a sacrificial worldview to a more person-centered search for “liberation” (*moksha*) became manifest. The knowledge of the correct performance of the ritual shifted to a knowledge based on insight and realization of inner wisdom. It was in the Upanishads that the central terms and concepts of classical “Hinduism” (that is, Veda-based traditions) were formulated and expounded. Both with regard to the Vedic and epic epoch, it is paramount to bear in mind that not a single, systematized Veda-based religion dominated the Indian subcontinent. Rather, a parallelism of various religious traditions and strands, at times markedly influenced by local cults, existed.

Epoch of the Epics or Classical Hinduism

The time of so-called classical Hinduism can roughly be set from the late 6th century BCE to the 11th century CE. The shift from the Vedic to the epic epoch is

based on both socioeconomic and religious changes. These took place in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. During that time span, northern India witnessed an increase in urbanization and occupational differentiation. A self-content trading strata emerged, and the numerous smaller kingdoms were replaced by larger ones. In religious terms, during these centuries, a variety of renouncer traditions emerged. Among the many *shramana*, or ascetic movements, prevalent in those days were the Buddhist and the Jain traditions. Like the many other renouncer traditions, they questioned the ritualistic predominance and the religious monopoly of the Brahmins. The many *shramana* movements and orders of *sadhus* (good men, renouncers) and *sadhvis* (good women) accepted the authority of the Veda. In contrast, the Buddhists and Jains questioned the attributed sacred status of the texts. The two latter came to be labeled as heterodox or heretic, and in the course of succeeding centuries, various means were taken either to destroy their centers of learning or to conceptually absorb the teachings and religious practices. At times, powerful rulers such as the famous kings Ashoka (268–233 BCE) and Kanishka (first century CE) supported the Buddhist *sangha* (order); at other times, dynasties such as the Guptas (320–600 CE) were less favorable and more in support of the brahmanical sacrificial traditions. In particular, from the Guptas onward, the brahmanical traditions regained their central sociopolitical status in the Indian subcontinent, as these were concerned with the ritually legitimized status of the king, the maintenance of boundaries between the social strata, and the regulation of a person's behavior according to the general principle of *dharma* (order, obligation). Nevertheless, since the middle of the first millennium BCE and parallel to the established brahmanical traditions, groups of ascetics and renouncers came into existence. These advocated a homeless life, depended for food on alms, and minimized, in varying degrees, personal ownership of possessions. These ascetics, by virtue of their austere life and yogic exercises, became religious authorities in their own right. To them lay devotees may come for spiritual advice and instruction as well as to have *darshan* (sight, seeing the divine) and to receive *prasad* (food from the gods). In this way, apart from the heterodox traditions, the strand of brahmanical sacrificial tradition(s) was faced with a strand of nonestablished, and often nonresident, authority of sacred knowledge and practice, based on the Veda.

During the epic epoch, both the central religious ideas of “mainstream” Hinduism crystalized, and the leading gods and deities stepped forth. The separate section below will explain the main sociopolitical and doctrinal ideas, and thus we now turn to the emergence of the devotional veneration of one god (*ishtadeva*, deity of choice). The strengthening of the devotional, or *bhakti*, movement, in the southern subcontinent in particular, the expanding popularity of the epics and the Puranas among the general population, as well as the absorption of pre-Vedic and non-Aryan religious forms had their impact on this long-term development. In this way, during the second half of the first millennium CE, the main Hindu traditions, with their focus on Shiva, Vishnu, and Devi (goddess), took shape. Although the

latter often is subsumed under the former—that is, the goddess being the wife or consort to Shiva and thus forming a part of the Shaivite tradition—it rightfully can be argued to speak of a line or strand of its own. The god Shiva in one of his many manifestations is known as a Himalayan ascetic, residing on the sacred mountain Kailas. Often he is venerated in the form of a linga, a smooth, cylindrical stone. He is also associated with a divine family, his wife Parvati personifying Shiva's female energy, *shakti*, together with the sons Ganesha and Skanda (or Murukan). Shiva is an ambivalent god, being both destructive and benevolent.

Like Shiva, Vishnu is described iconographically in many stories and myths in the Puranas. The followers of Vishnu, called Vaishnavas, venerate him in one of his 10 *avatars* (incarnations). Most important among these are the figures of Rama and Krishna; they form central figures in the great epical stories. The goddess tradition is associated with powerful female deities such as Kali, Durga, and many local goddesses. The character of the goddesses is often ambivalent; they can give life and fertility, but can also generate destruction and death. Her followers are called Shaktas; the devotional and ritual strand refers back to both tantric texts and non-Aryan practices. At various times—and a process going on these days, also—formerly local goddesses may be identified with the pan-Indian Devi, providing additional legitimation for her veneration and her inclusion in brahmanical worship.

These deities were honored both at home and in temples. Brahmins performed a manifold complex of rituals, in particular in the temples. From the sixth century CE onward, important temple cities evolved. These cities were not only centers of commerce and administration, but also ritual centers, with the temple at the hub of the town and the streets radiating outward. The city formed the capital of the regional kingdom, and brahmanical ritual and the temple supported the power and sovereignty of the dynasty. Outstanding examples of such royal-religious cities were Madurai, Citamparam, and Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu (South India), or Puri in Orissa (East India) with the Jagannatha temple.

Finally, notable during the first millennium CE, Hindu (and Buddhist) practices and concepts spread to Southeast Asia by way of Indians in search of economic wealth. Records provide evidence that brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas, as well as renouncers crossed the sea to find a living and wealth in foreign lands. This process, stretching from the 1st to the 13th century, has become known as the Indianization of mainland Southeast Asia and the archipelago. The local courts employed Indian warriors and priests to settle their power and to legitimize their reign ritually. Hindu and Buddhist elements were not so much superimposed on as creatively absorbed by the local nobility and elite. Localized versions of the *Ramayana* and other important doctrinal sources evolved, incorporating indigenous legends and myths. With the advance of Islam and the supremacy of Theravada Buddhism in Siam (Thailand) and Laos, the Sanskritic culture in Southeast Asia came to its end. In Bali, however, the particular version of Indo-Javanese culture and religion has survived to today.

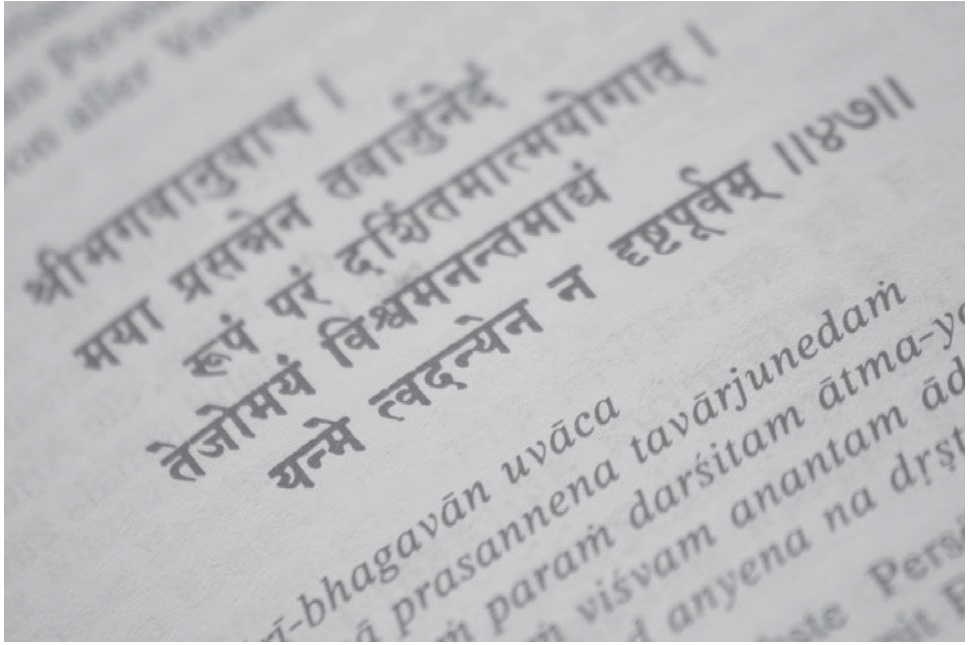
Epoch of Postclassical Hinduism and Islamic Rule

Spanning the time from about 1100 to 1800, this epoch witnessed less innovative religious impulses than the preceding epoch of classical Hinduism or the succeeding one of Neo-Hinduism. Of paramount political importance was the gradual conquering of India by Muslim rulers, beginning with the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni in northwest India (977–1030). Later, the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) was followed by the Mughal Empire (1526–1757). Although neither the Mughals nor—gradually from 1757 onward—the British actually imposed their religion on the Indians, both esteemed their religion as superior. They looked down upon Hindu beliefs and practices. In the 15th century, Muslim-Hindu syncretistic interpretations evolved. Most prominent among these new understandings were the concepts and practices proposed by bhakti poet Kabir (1440–1518) and Nanak (1469–1539). Nanak founded the Sikh tradition and was the first of a line of 10 gurus, based in the Punjab. Also notable was the religiously tolerant rule of the great Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1555–1605). The Hindu traditions, differentiated along regional and devotional lines, also had some outstanding interpreters such as the *dvaita* renouncer Madhva (13th century). In line with his view, the Bengali saint Chaitanya (1486–1533) founded the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradaya* or subtradition. His ecstatic dancing and singing enabled him to experience the love of Radha and Krishna. In the 20th century, the Bengali Vaishnava Prabhupada felt inspired by Chaitanya and Madhva, founding the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York in 1966. Other important theologians and poets of the 16th and 17th centuries, spreading their devotional form of religiosity in vernacular rather than Sanskrit verses, had been Vallabha (1479–1531), Tulsidas (c. 1532–1632), and Dadu (1544–1660), as well as Tukaram (1608–1649) and Ramdas (1608–1681). The latter two praised Hindu-ness and glorified past “golden ages.”

Epoch of Neo-Hinduism, British Rule, and Independence

From the 16th century onward, the Portuguese started to establish trading posts on the Indian coast. They were followed by Dutch, French, and British companies, all striving to gain a share in the lucrative trade in spices. The British strengthened their commercial and administrative position gradually. In 1757, the British East India Company secured Bengal by military force. Over the course of the next 100 years, the company was able to spread its commercial and military influence all over India. The Indian economy was changed to mainly the exporting of goods, which consequently ruined local trade and business. English became the official language of the administration and the law courts. In 1858, the British Crown officially adopted India as its colony, establishing a centralized administration for the whole country.

The industrialization of the Indian economy was accompanied by the establishment of the British educational system as well as the arrival of Christian missionaries. Earlier on, British administrators and scholars had started to study and



The Bhagavad Gita, originally written in Sanskrit, was translated into English by Charles Wilkins, a printer and typographer. (iStockphoto)

collect the numerous sacred texts. Charles Wilkins translated the Bhagavad Gita into English in 1785, followed by William Jones's translation of the Manusmriti in 1789. Christian missionaries aimed to convert members of the high castes, though with little success. They strongly criticized Indian customs such as child-marriage and the self-immolation of widows (*sati*). Such criticism was also voiced by Indian social reformers, most notably by the Bengali Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). Influenced by Muslim and Christian ideas, in particular by the Unitarians, Roy formed the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. He intended to spread a rational, ethical monotheism, which according to him had its roots in the Upanishads and *Brahma Sutra*. The society was modeled on Christian reform movements and met regularly for religious services during which passages from the Upanishads were read, hymns sung, and sermons delivered. Some 50 years later, Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883) founded the Arya Samaj in 1875. He emphasized a return to the Veda and denied the authenticity of Puranic Hinduism. The Arya Samaj criticized Brahman-based ritual worship of images or “idols,” worked for the uplift of women, and glorified an assumed “golden Vedic age.”

The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj organizationally and conceptionally pioneered what came to be known as Neo-Hinduism or Hindu Renaissance. They were followed by other influential reformers and their organizations, most notably Vivekananda (1863–1902, disciple of Ramakrishna), Shri Aurobindo (1872–1950), and Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948). These and other spokesmen were strongly influenced by Western ideas and Christian values, making use of these in order to

bring about a revival of Hinduism and an independent India. Religious reforms and a burgeoning Indian nationalism went hand in hand, reclaiming an “unpolluted,” sovereign Aryan past. These Western-educated reformers used the English language to spread their ideas, circulated texts and pamphlets, stressed social services, and criticized what they saw as degenerated Hindu customs and practices. They constructed a Hinduism based on reason and ethical spirituality, equal or superior to Christianity and Islam. Although this reformist Hinduism has acquired the image of representing “typical Hinduism” in the West, especially that championed by Vivekananda and the Vedanta Society (founded 1894), in India itself, the various reform movements have attracted only small followings. Their religious impact has remained confined to the educated, urban strata of Indian society, not reaching the mass of the Hindu people.

The movement for Indian self-rule (*svaraj*) grew stronger in the 1920s and 1930s, headed by Gandhi and his campaign based on the principle of *satyagraha* (holding fast to the truth). India gained independence in 1947, Nehru becoming its first prime minister. Based on democratic ideals and a secular constitution, Hindu political nationalists have questioned the latter in particular during the last two decades of the 20th century. The nationalists used the religious argument to a large extent for the achievement of political and ideological aims. A climax was reached with the destruction in 1992 of the Babri mosque (built in 1528) in Ayodhya. Communalism and the right-wing *Hindutva* policy (making India Hindu) have since undermined the country’s self-claimed prestige as the most numerous secular democracy of the world.

The late-19th-century reinterpretation of Hinduism along Western organizational models and ideas was vital to paving the way for a trans-Indian outreach of Hinduism. Vivekananda’s famous speech at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and his two-year stay in the United States made him the first effective proponent of Hinduism as a universal religion. An idealized image of India as the land of spiritually superior gurus (grave persons) and of Hinduism as a religion of tolerance and deep devotion reinforced previously held Western glorifications (prevalent since the late 18th century). This positive perception was strengthened as Hindu teachers, swamis, and gurus started to visit the West from the 1950s onward. A variety of groups and organizations were founded, and they won followers among the hippies and the counterculture. Most prominent have become the Transcendental Meditation (now organized as the Global Country of World Peace) of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; Swami Pabhupadas’s International Society for Krishna Consciousness; Shree Hans Ji Maharaj’s Divine Light Mission (superseded by Elan Vital); the Ananda Marga Yoga Society, founded by Shree Shree Amandamurti; the Neo-Sannyas Movement (Osho Commune International), centered on the teachings of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho); the Brahma Kumaris; and Sahaja Yoga.

Hindu practices, customs, and ideas had left India prior to this export of spiritual practices, however. Between 1838 and 1917, Britain’s colonial authorities recruited

workers from India for labor in the mines and sugar fields in South Africa, the Caribbean, and the Malayan-Pacific region. Also, laborers left India to build the railway in East Africa and to earn a living as traders there. The overall number of these indentured workers is estimated to have been in excess of 1.5 million. Communities of Hindu and, to a lesser degree, Muslim Indians were formed in the faraway colonies. The religious heritage was not abandoned, despite attempts to convert the Indians to Christianity. Rather, the religious belonging and rituals were maintained and handed down through the generations. As a result, sizable Hindu communities exist from the time of indentureship in such scattered locations as Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, East and South Africa (Natal), Mauritius, Malaysia, and the Fiji Islands.

A very different trajectory has brought hundreds of thousands of Indians to the West since the 1960s. Because of changes in foreign policy (especially that of the United States), shifts in immigration policies, and the need for increased work forces abroad, Indians were allowed to immigrate to Canada, the United States, and Australia. Furthermore, Indians had begun a significant move to Great Britain following Indian independence and, beginning in the 1950s, settled in other European countries as well. Finally, because of the oil boom, workers were needed to build new houses and cities in the Near East, and many Indians live there temporarily. A widespread network of communications has been set up by Hindus in the different places, using the airplane, telephone, Internet, and e-mail to maintain contact with fellow Hindus abroad and in India. Also, as is the case with the converted “Western” Hindus, the Indian Hindu communities and their newly erected and consecrated temples are often visited by gurus and swamis from India. Confined for three millennia to the Indian subcontinent (with the exception of Indianized Southeast Asia), during the 20th century, Hinduism became a globally distributed religion.

Principal Concepts and Practice

At the close of the Vedic and the shift to the epic epoch, the texts of the Aranyakas and Upanishads expounded on the principal concepts of classical Hinduism. The notion of dharma started to become a leading religious concept: dharma, though untranslatable in any Western language as it has no direct semantic equivalents, conveys the meaning of duty, norm, obligation, and cosmic law or order. A Hindu person is said to act according to the dharma of his or her varna and jati—that is, to stick to the obligations and restrictions imposed by one’s birth. Birth and rebirth in specific jatis is dependent on the person’s karma (action). All living beings are thought to be reborn repeatedly in the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*), this according to the cause and effect of the actions and deeds a person had performed in life. There are different “disciplines” (yoga, from the Skt. root *yuj*, to control) or “paths” (*marga*) to gain moksha, or liberation, from this beginning-less cycle: the path of action (karma marga) entails the path of unselfish action—that is, of fulfilling one’s duty (dharma) without expecting praise or blame. The path of knowledge

(*jnana-marga*) is constituted by attaining scriptural knowledge and by this “true insight” into the real nature of the universe. The path of devotion (*bhakti marga*), most emphasized throughout the great epic *Bhagavad Gita*, outlines as means for final liberation the surrender to and wholehearted trust in the god venerated. Basic to these different paths is the fundamental correspondence of the all-pervading ultimate reality or truth (Brahman) and the human soul (*atman*). To reach liberation is to understand this basic unity of Brahman and *atman*. The *Chandogya* Upanishad explains this nonseparatedness in the famous conversation between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaku: the father asks the son to dissolve salt in water and says that Brahman and *atman* are united in a similar manner. The father ends the teaching in explaining: “The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this world; that is the truth; that is the self (*atman*); and that is how you are (*tat tvam asi*)” (6.13).

The two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (including the *Bhagavad Gita*), in particular, expound on and make known the central Hindu concepts and the different paths to liberation. These epics, composed from 200 BCE to 300 CE and followed by other texts, such as the *Manusmriti* (codes of law), the *Puranas* (old stories), *sutras*, and *shastras* (normative and scientific texts), all belong to the category of *smriti* (remembered, handed down). *Smriti* texts are of human authorship; they explain, comment on, and prescribe ideas and lifestyles touched on in the *Vedas*. Although theoretically, this literature is of lesser authority than the *Vedas*, it has played a far more important role in the lives and religiosity of Hindus for the last 2,000 years. In particular, the *sutras* and *shastras* provide a normative structuring of a person’s obligation (*dharma*), both with regard to one’s position in society (i.e., duties according to one’s *varna*) and with regard to one’s stage of life (*ashrama*). These two concerns together became known as *varnashrama-dharma*. Its fulfillment was a sign of brahmanical orthopraxy, and in many Hindu traditions, this model codified the ideal of a “true Hindu life.” *Smarta* brahmins are especially proud and eager to follow the teachings and prescriptions of the *smriti* texts. The four different stages that a male “twice-born” (*dvija*) is expected to take are: *brahmacarya*, the stage of boy student, learning the *Veda*; *grihastha*, the stage of householder, raising a family; *vanaprastha*, the stage of hermit or forest-dweller, retiring from the householder’s duties; and *sannyasa*, the final stage of renouncer, concentrating on final liberation. The obligations of married women were generally referred to as *stri-dharma*, the duties of the wife. According to the *Manusmriti*, women are to be subject to male control and authority throughout their lives; they have to be docile and virtuous.

As mentioned, of paramount importance to teaching basic Hindu ideas, norms, and practices to the common Hindu were the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Some two-and-a-half millennia later, these mythological dramas continue to attract an unsurpassed interest. The stories and their morale are told by parents to their children, set on stage by village theater groups, and broadcast in phenomenally successful television productions in the 1980s. The *Ramayana*,

or story of King Rama, exists in a multitude of versions, the most widely known being the one attributed to Valmiki. The main plot of the story is the abduction of Princess Sita, wife of Rama, by the demon Ravana and the freeing of Sita and her return to Ayodhya with the help of the monkey general Hanuman. The story's morale centers on the fulfillment of one's dharma—that is, on loyal obedience to one's social role and obligations. In the same way, the *Mahabharata* highlights the virtues of devoted service to and dutiful observance of one's dharma. The main part of the story circles around struggles for throne succession among cousins, culminating in a battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The eve of the battle sets the scene for the Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord), the well-known dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. Doubtful Arjuna, who is hesitant to fight his relatives, is convinced by his charioteer Krishna that it is his social and religious obligation, or dharma, to go into the war. As a member of the warrior class, he has to fulfill his duty. Krishna, though disguised as charioteer, is really the supreme Lord, and he offers Arjuna guidance in the same way a teacher (guru) instructs his pupil. In the 18 chapters of the Gita, the three principle disciplines or paths to attain liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth are also explained prominently, among many further themes.

The shaping and codifying of basic Hindu concepts and norms from the middle of the first millennium BCE onward was accompanied by the development of different philosophical systems and the growth of so-called sectarian or tradition-wise worship of particular deities from the middle of the first millennium CE. From around the third to the sixth century CE, theologians and philosophers worked out six so-called orthodox perspectives or systems (*darshana*) commonly identified in Hindu thought. Each system is based on a specific text and commentaries, containing logic, analysis, and scriptural exegesis. The *samkhya* darshana advocates a dualistic and atheistic differentiation of self or spirit (*purusha*) and matter (*prakriti*). The yoga darshana, based on the Yoga Sūtra of Patanjali (fifth century), builds on the dualism of samkhya. It focuses, however, on the spiritual discipline required for the self to attain moksha, or liberation. The *mimamsa* darshana places its emphasis on right action (dharma), whereas the *nyaya* darshana elaborates on a system of logic, leading to liberation. The *vaisheshika* darshana constitutes a system of atomistic analysis of the categories of dharma and their constituent elements. Finally, the vedanta darshana, like the *mimamsa* darshana a system of Vedic exegesis, concentrates on the Upanishadic teaching on ultimate reality (Brahman). In the following centuries, the vedanta system was differently interpreted by philosophers and renunciators. Most prominent among the many have been Shankara (c. 788–820), Ramanuja (1017–1137), and Madhva (1238–1317). Shankara favored the nondualist or *advaita* vedanta and established that viewpoint as the touchstone of a revived smarta orthodoxy. He was founder of 10 orders of sannyasis (renunciators) and set up four (or five) principal monasteries (*mathas*) or seats of learning (*vidyapithas*). The leading men of these seats are renowned spiritual and normative leaders known as

Shankaracharyas (masters [in the tradition] of Shankara), playing an important role through the centuries and up to the present. Being different from Shankara's theology, Ramanuja taught a qualified nondualist or *vishishtadvaita* vedanta. He disagreed with Shankara on the nature of Brahman, the individual selves, and the world. Ramanuja was the leader of a Shri Vaishnava Order (followers of Vishnu), arguing that Vishnu-Narayana is the ultimate Brahman, his relation to the world and souls being "qualified" as substance to attribute. In contrast to Shankara's and Ramanuja's understandings, Madhva exposed a dualist, or *dvaita*, vedanta. He stressed the absolute sovereignty of God and differentiated the fivefold set of absolute distinctions between (1) God and souls, (2) God and the world, (3) souls and souls, (4) souls and the world, and (5) matter in its different aspects. These theological conceptualizations cannot be differentiated from philosophical systematizations; a sharp distinction is hardly possible.

Worship and the veneration of the chosen deity take many different forms in the Hindu traditions and *sampradayas*. To the vast majority of people, the above sketched philosophical investigations are rather less known. The bulk of devotees engage in the recitation of the name of the deity, in praying to the various gods and goddesses and receiving *darshan*, in joint singing at a meeting (*samkirtana*, *bhaja* singing), in night vigils of prayer and song, and in attending fire sacrifices in the temple or at home. Individual prayer is more prevalent than congregational forms of worship. A devotee may concentrate on a mental image of a god or pray in front of an (*murti*). The honoring and worship can be daily, or it can be performed occasionally before the home shrine and without a foot ever set in a temple. Also, some may go on a pilgrimage (*tirthayatra*) to the holy spots in India, while many will attend the various specific festival days (*utsava*, *yatra*), celebrated throughout the year. One of the most popular forms of worship is the *puja*, the ritual offering of hospitality to a god or goddess as a most welcome and honored guest. The Brahman offers flowers, camphor, water, light, fruits, and food, as well as mantras to venerate the deity. At specific days and occasions, a ritual bathing (*abhishekam*) will take place, the Brahman offering a number of precious ingredients to the deity. As an expression of one's faith and devotion, a devotee may give gifts (*dana*) and undertake fasts and vows (*vrata*). In life-cycle ceremonies, memorial rites, and rites of expiation, the favor of the deity is sought through prayer and invocations. Of particular practical importance for many Hindus is the knowledge of auspicious times according to astrological constellations. In ancient times, these were used to determine the appropriate times for Vedic sacrifices, and it has become a common belief that terrestrial events correspond to celestial phenomena. The constellations are held to have a direct effect on important life events. Hindus consult an astrologer or a Brahman to have a horoscope cast, providing information about beneficial and unfavorable times. According to the days and hours specified, children's ritual names are selected, marriages arranged and performed, debts paid, businesses started, travels done, and much

more. In contrast to Western astrologies, the Hindu system considers the moon rather than the sun to be of fundamental importance.

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See also Diwali; Holi; Janmashtami; Navaratri.

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Hinduism—Festivals and Holidays

Contemporary Hinduism may, for purposes of analysis, be thought of as a modern construct imposed by outsiders to make sense of the religious diversity of the Indian subcontinent. The modern country of India united a land mass that was in centuries past the home to a number of countries whose people spoke a variety of different languages, a few of which remain in broad regional use. Hindi

and English are now the national languages for business, politics, and education, but 14 additional languages have official status in at least one of India's states: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayana, Maranathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. At least 10 other languages are spoken by more than a million people, and more than 100 languages by as many as 10,000 people. At the ground level, many of the religious differences that manifest around the country are reflections of the different languages.

The different countries and languages also manifested in a set of different calendars, at least one for each major language group. These calendars had some similarity, with months set from astronomical/astrological observations beginning with the movement of the sun into what in the West is the sign of Aries and months being calculated with each movement of 30 degrees by the sun through the heavens. Imposed upon that astrological calendar is a lunar calendar built around the 28+ day movement of the moon. Most holidays were set according to the place of the moon in a particular solar month. The diversity of calendars was then affected by the imposition of the Muslim calendar in the 13th century and the Gregorian calendar in the 18th century.

Following Indian independence, a new Indian solar calendar, with the New Year beginning at the spring equinox, was adopted. It took as its starting point the vernal (spring) equinox of 78 CE, a date of importance in the life of the Satavahana dynasty, which ruled much of India from around approximately 230 BCE to around 220 CE, about 450 years. In 78 CE, the Satavahana ruler is believed to have initiated a new era marking his victory over Vikramaditya, the ruler of a neighboring kingdom, Ujjayini. The new era came to be known as Shalivahana Saka. The calendar finally introduced in India in 1957 became known as the Saka calendar.

The Saka calendar has 12 months, all of them either 30 or 31 days in length. There is a provision of adding a leap year day as needed. The calendar begins with a New Year's Day on the vernal (spring) equinox, March 21 or 22 on the Common Era calendar. It is the official calendar for all government business in India, and official Indian holidays are fixed on the Saka calendar (and will thus appear every year on the same date of the Common Era calendar). Newspapers will most often print both the date for the Saka calendar and the Common Era calendar on their front page. The 12 months of the Saka calendar are:

1. Chaitra
2. Vaishakh
3. Jyaishta
4. Ashadha
5. Shravana
6. Bhadrapad
7. Ashwin
8. Kartika

9. Agrahayana
10. Paush
11. Magh
12. Phalgun

The calendar reform committee subsequently introduced a new religious calendar for the calculation of Hindu festival days. The religious calendar privileged the lunar cycles but in a way that allowed their calculation in a manner that tied them to the new Saka calendar but at the same time gave the appearance of being quite separate from it. The religious calendar is built around 12 lunar months (that somewhat confusingly have the same names as the solar-based Saka calendar). The lunar month is named for the solar month in which the new moon occurs. Should two new moons occur in the same solar month, a month is added. The added month is given the name of the immediately previous month. In centuries past, lunar months were reckoned from new moon to new moon in southern India and from full moon to full moon elsewhere (which at times created a two-week difference in dating holidays between the north and south). In the new reformed (and national) calendar, lunar months are always measured from new moon to new moon. Days also reckoned to begin at sunrise rather than midnight.

In this encyclopedia, the statement of the date of a Hindu festival is given relative to the new Hindu lunar calendar. For practical purposes, anyone seeking to know when a particular holiday occurs in any given year would need to double check the date against a current Hindu calendar.

The number of Hindu festivals is staggering, there being multiple holidays and/or commemorations set for almost every day of the year, though most, like the saint's days in the Roman Catholic Church, are of primarily local interest. The most widely celebrated Hindu religious festivals in India are Diwali, Holi, Navaratri, Guru Purnima, Rama Navami, Janmashtami, and Mahashivaratri. These, like most Hindu festivals, are set on the new religious calendar, and thus remain movable events on the solar (Saka) and Common Era calendars. The amount of movement has, however, been limited significantly.

Diwali, the festival of lights held each fall as the month of Ashwin ends and Kartika begins (usually in late October or early November on the Common Era calendar), is the single most celebrated holiday across India, uniting all segments of the religious community. Its pervasiveness, like Christmas in North America, has led other religious communities to highlight their own commemorations that coincide with Diwali. The primary story told for Diwali concerns what is known as the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, a story that in its various segments features Vishnu, Shiva, and Lakshmi, the three major deities central to the three divisions of the Hindu community, the Vaishnavas, the Saivites, and the Shakta Tantrism (or goddess worshippers). Diwali is an official national holiday in India.

Holi is possibly the second-most celebrated holiday in India, though it is observed under a variety of different names (Dol Purnima, Gaura Purnima). It occurs on the full moon (or purnima) of the month of Phalguna (February–March on the Common Era calendar). Again, stories of the three principal deities are told, and the primary activity for which the day is known is the splashing of colored water on celebrants. Holi is celebrated across India and is an official holiday in all the states except those in the far south, such as Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, and Nagaland in the far northeast on the Burmese border.

Navaratri, also known as Durga Puja, is a nine-day celebration held twice in the year in the spring and fall, though the fall celebration is primary. Navaratri primarily celebrates Durga (an aspect of Parvati, the consort of Shiva). Even more than Lakshmi (the consort of Vishnu), Parvati/Durga is the focus of attention of Shakta Tantric Hinduism. Shakti is seen as power—the primordial creative, sustaining and destructive force conceived as female in nature. Shakti is not so much an individual goddess (though seen as particularly visible in goddesses such as Kali or Durga), as the dynamic quality possessed by all goddesses and even all women. The shakti energy is also identified with kundalini, the energy pictured as a coiled serpent lying latent at the base of the spine. The awakening of the kundalini allows it to rise up the spinal column and bring enlightenment.

In most Vaishanva temples (oriented on Vishnu) and Saivite temples (oriented on Shiva), the female goddess will be prominently present, though usually under her role as the spouse and thus standing next to the primary deity or in a secondary spot. In goddess temples, she will be in the center of the main worship area.

The Hindu calendar is primarily a lunar calendar in which the day of the new and full moons are singled out. The new moon or purnima, when in the days before electricity the night would be most illuminated, was a time each month for celebration, and many evening celebrations occurred on that night. Guru Purnima each summer was a time to honor one's teacher. Holi, which happens to occur on the full moon, is celebrated as Dol Purnima or Gaura Purnima in eastern India. Sharad Purnima, the full moon after the rainy season, is a time to worship the moon and the light showered upon the earth.

New Year's Day

The Saka calendar begins on the day after the vernal equinox, on the first day of the month of Chaitra, usually March 22 on the Common Era calendar (March 21 in a leap year). Hindus focus their celebration on the deity Brahma as they consider him the Creator and believe that he began creating the world on this day. Most local celebrations in the Indian state follow the new calendar and celebrate the New Year on the first day of the month of Chaitra. It is however, celebrated under a variety of names. Also, in different states, the dating is different—a reflection of the still-surviving older local calendars. In Tamil Nadu, for example, New Year's Day is called Puthandu and is observed on the first day of the month of Chithirai in the

Tamil calendar (or April 13 or 14 on the Common Era calendar). April 13–14 is also observed in Nepal and the Indian states of Kerala, Orissa, and West Bengal.

Vaishnava Holidays

The largest number of Hindus in India follows one of the forms of Vaishnavism, which is centered upon the deity Vishnu. Vishnu is seen as having incarnated 10 times over the centuries, and temples dedicated to the various incarnations and additional forms he has assumed are scattered around the countryside. The 10 major incarnations are as follows: Matsya (as a fish); Kurma (as a tortoise), Varaha, the man-lion Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama (of the *Ramayana*). Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki (the future incarnation yet to appear). The single most popular incarnation of Vishnu is Krishna, a fact reflected in that the birthday of Krishna, known as Janmashtami, is the single most widely celebrated Vaishnava holiday, and an official holiday in most states of India. Krishna worship is most concentrated in the lands through which the Ganges flows from Bengal to Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Krishna's popularity is at times challenged by Rama, whose main holiday is Rama Navana, his birthday. The birthdays (jayanti) of the other incarnations (Varaha Jayanti, Narasimha Jayanti, Parashurama Jayanti, etc.), along with characters associated with these incarnations, such as the Monkey God Hanuman, form one cycle of Vaishnava festival events.

Krishna's life is marked in some detail. Not only is his birth celebrated, but holidays mark his youth, his pastimes among the young girls who herded cows (Gopies), various miracles attributed to him, and his adult participation in various wars and battles. His brother Balarama is often seen as an extension of him or even as an incarnation of Vishnu in his own right. Both are celebrated in the famous Rathayatra or Jagannath Festival in Puri.

Just as most Hindus look upon the monthly purnima (full moon) as a holy day, Vaishnava devotees also look to the 11th (*ekadashi*) day after the full moon and after the new moon, some 29 days out of each year, as especially sacred to Vishnu. These days are more somber occasions relative to the larger public gatherings typical for the deities' birthday celebrations, and are set aside for ritual baths, fasting meditation, visits to the temple, and contemplation of one's life. Each of the *ekadashi* days has a slightly different emphasis, and a few have arisen above the lot as especially auspicious days, often because of a belief that at certain times, observance multiplies benefits. Major *ekadashi* observances occur on Nirjala Ekadashi (in the month of Jyaishta); Hari-Shayani Ekadashi (in the month of Āshādhā); Putrada Ekadashi (in the month of Shrāvana); Mokshada Ekadashi (in the month of Agrahayana); and Vaikuntha Ekadashi (in the month of Phalguna). In addition, Vaishnavas mark the rainy season with a four-month observance called Chaturmas Vrat, which begins officially on Deva Sayana Ekadashi, the 11th day of the waxing moon during the Indian Hindu month of Ashadh, and concludes on the 11th day of the waning moon in the month of Kartika.

Above and beyond these main holidays, there are a variety of additional celebrations that focus upon incidents in the lives of Vishnu's various incarnations and additional manifestations, and the careers of famous Vaishnava devotees. In the West, the most famous Vaishnava groups have grown out of the Gaudiya Math, a *bhakti* (devotional) form of Hinduism centered upon Krishna and dating from the revival led by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1532). Chaitanya was born on Holi, and his birth is widely celebrated by Vaishnavas in and around Bengal. In like measure, the birthdays (appearance day) of the gurus in the Gaudiya Math lineage are celebrated.

Shaivite Holidays

The events in the life of the deity Shiva and his family are celebrated by Shaivites throughout India, who are especially evident in the southern states. Shiva, the epitome of the male warrior god, and also seen as a model of the meditative life, is married to Parvati, who appears in many aspects and under many names. She is the mother of several children, most notably Murugan and Ganesh, each of whom are celebrated in their own right. Shiva and his son Murugan, or Skanda, are especially remembered on *shashti* (the sixth day of each half month), in a manner that Vishnu is honored on the 11th (as for example on Hala Shashti, Skandi Shashti, or Surya Shashti). In addition, Shiva is singled out for attention during the fifth Hindu month (*Shrāvana*), with added emphasis on the Mondays.

The main Shaivite holiday annually is *Mahashivaratri*, celebrated just before the new moon during the month of *Phalgun*. It is an official holiday in most Indian states. The 14th day of the waning moon half of every lunar month is called *Shivaratri* (i.e., “the night for Shiva”). *Shivaratri* in the month of *Magha* (February–March on the Common Era calendar) is designated as *Mahashivaratri* (or the Great Shiva Night.) There are several stories in the Hindu holy books known as the *Puranas* related to this evening. One tells of a hunter who fasted before, watched over, and bathed a Shiva Linga, all night, seemingly unaware that it was the evening of *Mahashivaratri*. His actions alone, in spite of his lack of awareness, took him directly to the abode of Shiva.

Shiva's son is honored during *Ganesh Chaturdashi*, a 10-day festival in the month of *Bhadrapad*. It starts on the fourth day of the waxing moon (August–September on the Common Era calendar). *Ganesh Chaturdashi* culminates on the *pur-nima* when all the representations of the deity are cast into the local river, lake, or ocean. The largest Ganesh festival is in Mumbai.

Ganesh's brother, Lord Murugan, a.k.a. Subrahmanya, is a popular deity in Tamil-speaking areas of southern India (and in the Tamil diaspora in Singapore, Malaysia, the Caribbean, and North America). Tamils in Kuala Lumpur have erected a mega-statue at the Batu caves, their main worship site north of the city. The worship of Murugan, according to the Tamil calendar, is punctuated throughout the year with festivals such as *Skanda Shasti*, in the Tamil month of *Appasi* (October–November);

Thaipusam, famous for the ordeal that young men put themselves through, in the Tamil month of Thai (January–February); and Thirukarthigai, his birthday on the *purnima* of the Tamil month of Karthigai (November–December).

Parvati, Shiva's consort, is also known as Meenakshi among the Tamils, who have erected a large temple to her, the Meenakshi Amman Temple in the city of Madurai. This is the site of the annual Meenakshi Float Festival during the Magha Purnima celebration, when her statue and that of Shiva (here called Sundreshvara) are processed from the temple to the local lake, where they placed on a boat and ridden around a shrine in the middle of the lake. The largest festival, however, is the spring Chittirai Festival, which is focused at the Madurai temple and reenacts the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundreshvara. The Chittirai festival begins on the fifth day of the bright half of the Tamil month of Chittirai (which occurs in April–May on the Common Era calendar).

Shiva is often pictured with a cobra coiled around his neck, and cobras and other poisonous snakes are found throughout India. The worship of snakes (*nagas*) has become one means of attempting to live with the serpent community and keep it from harming humans. Naga worship is generally seen as a part of the Saivite tradition and temples specializing in it may be found both in India and in the diaspora communities. The primary festival for the snakes is Nagapanchami, during the month of Shravana.

Mother Goddess

Devi, the divine mother, is usually equated with Shakti, the female aspect of divinity (*devi* is the Sanskrit word for goddess). Devi manifests as Lakshmi and Parvati and the many additional goddesses that fill out the Vaishnava and Shavite pantheons, but is the central deity of the Shakta Tantric tradition. Here, she is seen both as performing a vital function, giving life to the form created by the male deities, but also as the divine female, an object of worship without particular reference to any male counterpart.

The goddess is primarily known through her appearances as Kali or Durga, the latter the subject of the annual Durga puja, Navaratri. Amid the Diwali celebrations, the goddess Lakshmi comes to the fore, not so much as the consort of Vishnu, but as the goddess of wealth. Many think of Diwali as beginning a new year and will thus pray to Lakshmi for prosperity. At the same time, however, in Bengal and surrounding regions, the dark goddess Kali replaces Lakshmi as the chief deity for the week. The main Kali Puja is performed at midnight on the night of the new moon (called *Amavasya*) when devotees ask for protection against drought and war while also seeking health, wealth, and happiness.

In addition to the three main Hindu communities, numerous additional new movements have emerged during and since the years of British rule. Many of these have responded to what was termed the Hindu renaissance and produced sectarian and/or more iconoclastic forms of Hinduism, some of which responded to the growing

presence of Christianity. While most of the newer forms of Hinduism are clearly part of one of the three major traditions, many are only loosely connected. A number of the newer groups have been founded by charismatic leaders and have developed holidays celebrating their founders and the lineage they represent, most frequently by developing commemorations of the birthdays (appearance day) or death days (disappearance day) of their teachers and their teachers' teachers. For those groups that have spread from India to the West, some of the new commemorations have become quite widespread, none more so than the birthday of Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), around whom an iconoclastic movement has developed. His birthday is celebrated on what is known as Guru Purnima. Other popular gurus whose birthday is commemorated internationally include Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Yogananda, Muktananda, and Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

In the modern Hindu diaspora, is it not uncommon for a minority-India community to create temples in which all three of the major Hindu traditions are celebrated (and at times, even Jain altars will added). Such temples will often have both Vishnu and Shiva acknowledged in their name, or will be named for the city whose Hindu community they serve. It is generally the case, however, that as soon as the community grows large enough, separate temples for Vaishnava, Shaivite, goddess, and Jain worship will be created, often adjacent to each other. Thus the calendar of celebration for each community may proceed, even when different holidays fall on the same day, or when separate celebrations of the same holiday occur because different groups pour different meanings and acknowledge distinct emphases for the same festival.

In mapping the Hindu community, holidays and festivals are one of the best means of understanding the distinct tradition of a particular Hindu temple, be it Vaishnava, Saivite Goddess, or multi-traditional—or an example of one of the newly created/revived traditions. Temples of different traditions (analogous to Christian denominational families) will follow completely different holiday/festival cycles.

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See also Calendars, Religious; Chittirai Festival; Common Era Calendar; Diwali; Ganesh Chaturthi; Gaura Purnima; Guru Purnima; Hala Shashti; Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Hinduism; Holi; Janmashtami; Magha Purnima; Mahashivaratri; Mokshada Ekadashi; Narasimha Jayanti; Nagapanchami; Navaratri; New Year's Day (India); Nirjala Ekadashi; Parshurama Jayanti; Putrada Ekadashi; Rama Navani; Ratha Yatra; Skanda Shashti; Surya Shashti; Thaipusam; Vaikuntha Ekadashi; Varaha Jayanti.

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Holi

Holi, also known as Plagwa, is a Hindu festival that takes place on the day of the full moon in the Indian lunar month of Phalguna (generally in February or March on the Common Era calendar). While celebrated by Hindus around the world, observation is most intense in places identified with the deity Krishna, an incarnation of the deity Vishnu, such as the Braj region in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Within Braj, the land of Krishna, one finds Mathura, the traditional birthplace of Krishna, and Vrindavan, the town now located where Lord Krishna spent his childhood days. Here the celebration may be stretched into two weeks or more.

In India, three stories are told as to why this day is celebrated. Devotees of Vishnu, called Vaishnavas, tell of Hiranyakashipu, the king of demons, who had been granted a boon by Brahma, making it almost impossible for him to be killed. As a result, he grew arrogant and went on a destructive rampage. Placing himself in their stead, he also attempted to stop the worship of the gods.

Hiranyakashipu's son, Prahlada, was a devotee of Lord Vishnu, and refused to stop even at his father's command. In spite of several threats from Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada continued offering prayers to Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu attempted to kill him. When his attempts failed, he commanded his son to place himself on the lap of his sister, Holika, on top of a fire. Holika was immune to fire as she wore a protective shawl. Prahlada followed his father's command while also praying to Vishnu to keep him safe. As the fire roared into flame, the shawl flew from Holika

and encased Prahlada, who survived unharmed. Holika was consumed. Holi remembers the burning of Holika. (Later, Lord Vishnu killed Hiranyakashipu.)

A second tale concerns an ogress called Dhundhi, a female monster who specially troubled small children who became fed up with her. She had received a boon from the deity Shiva that made her difficult to be killed. Shiva, however, left her vulnerable at one point: she could be endangered by boys going about acting crazily.

The king of the region affected by the ogress asked the local priest what to do. The answer was that on the 15th day of the month of Phalguna, he could have the village collect wood

and grass and set them on fire with mantras. As the fire burns, they should clap their hands, circle the fire three times, and make noise with laughter and song. The noise and the fire will get rid of the monster. The legend states that on the day of Holi, the boys united and chased Dhundhi away by their shouts, abuses, and pranks. Today on Holi, young boys are permitted to use rude language without their elders taking offense, while children enjoy burning Holika again.

A third story concerns the deity Shiva's third eye, pictured in most representations resting in the middle of his forehead. The story is told that his wife Uma came up behind him and covered his eyes with her hands. As a result, the world sunk into darkness. Again to save the world, Shiva developed a third eye on his forehead. When he opened that eye, the light returned to the world. Holi is a celebration of the day that Shiva initially opened his third eye, one consequence being that Kamadeva, the god of love, was reduced to ashes.

Holi is an ancient festival, very likely one that began before the Common Era. In one early form, married women celebrated the happiness and well-being of their families, but in a way that left in place a variety of sexual and erotic elements suggesting that the Holi may have derived from spring fertility rites. In some places in India, for example, sexually explicit songs may be sung and men might carry penis-shaped objects to brandish. One of the names for the festival is Kamamahotsava, or the Celebration for the God of Love.

Today, Holi is the festival of color, and the most popular activity festival is the throwing or shooting of colored water on everyone. In recent years, water balloons



Two young girls are smeared in colored powder according to the tradition of Holi. During this time, neighbors and strangers alike can expect to be sprayed with colored powders and colored water from water pistols in a symbolic gesture of peace and unity. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

have become popular. People will commonly wear white clothes so as that all the varied colors are visible on each participant. It was also not uncommon in years passed for men to drink generously of bhang, a potent marijuana concoction, during the celebrations.

Holi is a public holiday in most states in India.

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See also Diwali; Janmashtami.

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Holy Days of Obligation

In the Roman Catholic tradition, believers are expected to observe certain days of the year in a manner set apart from the mundane work days that fill their secular existence. Observation includes both positive and negative elements, the primary element being attendance at the central worship service for Roman Catholics, the Mass. Believers are also expected to continue in an attitude consistent with the worshipful atmosphere for the remainder of the day, and refrain from activities that tend to dissipate that primary focus on the remembrance and worship of god.

The regulations for the Holy Days of Obligation are spelled out, as is much of Catholic church life, in canon law, specifically canon 1246. Catholic regulations designate Sunday as the primary continuing day of obligation. In addition, additional days are also so designated, the number and focus of these additional days having widely varied over the years, though a few notable days such as Christmas (that is, the celebration of the nativity of Jesus Christ) have a most secure and permanent place on the list.

Currently, 10 days (when they do not occur on Sunday) are also considered Holy Days of Obligation:

- The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- Epiphany (January 6)
- The Solemnity of St. Joseph (March 19)

Ascension (Thursday of the sixth week after Easter)

Feast of Corpus Christi (the Body and Blood of Christ; Thursday after Trinity Sunday)

The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles (June 29)

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)

All Saints Day (November 1)

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8)

Christmas, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ (December 25)

There is a slightly different list of Days of Obligation within the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches, which do not observe all the above days. In different countries, the observation of the obligation attached to any particular day may be assigned to the Sunday closely preceding or following it. The practice of having weekly masses on Saturday has added a further element complicating the actual observance of the Days of Obligation, especially the necessity of attending a Mass. These exceptions being noted, the Holy Days of Obligation provide the most basic structure dominating Roman Catholic worship.

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Saints Day; Assumption of the Virgin; Christmas; Corpus Christi, Feast of; Epiphany; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Holy Family, Feast of the

As piety developed in the Western Catholic tradition, for a variety of reasons, the recognition of and veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary far outstripped that of Jesus' father, Joseph. In the modern era, various efforts have emerged to correct that imbalance, among them Veneration of the Holy Family, which was formally begun in the 17th century by François-Xavier de Montmorency-Laval (1623–1708), the first Roman Catholic bishop of New France (Canada). Named bishop in 1659, he would serve for almost half a century. During the first decade of his episcopacy, he founded a Confraternity of the Holy Family, formally begun on March 14, 1665.

Emphasis on the Holy Family through the entire Catholic Church was slow to spread. In the 1840s, a Belgian army officer, Henri Belletable, established a

religious society to assist the men with whom he worked. As the work grew, he associated with the local members of the Redemptorist order, and they informed the local bishop, who authorized the society as the confraternity of the Holy Family. Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) approved the society's statutes and, in 1847, elevated it to an archconfraternity. Over the next half century, it was able to establish itself in over 1,300 parishes and gather more than 400,000 members.

Pius IX's successor continued the new emphasis on the Holy Family. He especially favored an association devoted to family life and consecrated to the Holy Family that had been founded in 1861 by a Father Francoz, a Jesuit priest. In 1892, he consolidated a number of similar associations (save the archconfraternity) into this single association. In following year, he designated the feast of the Holy Family to be celebrated on the Sunday following Epiphany (between January 7 and 13). Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–1922) extended the feast as one to be celebrated throughout the Roman Catholic Church. In 1969, the feast day of the Holy Family was moved to the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, except on the year when those two days are on Sunday, when it is held on Friday, December 30.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holy Innocents' Day; Joseph, Feast day of St.; New Year's Day; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Holy Innocents' Day

The one element that detracts from the joy that dominates the Christmas season for Christians has been the fact that in his attempt to prevent the coming of age of anyone who might challenge his power, King Herod, on hearing of the birth of a "King of the Jews" heralded by the new star in the sky, ordered the slaying of all the male children under the age of two in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Jesus and his family escaped the event by moving to Egypt for the remainder of Herod's reign (Matthew 1:11–18). Estimates of the number actually slain vary, from a dozen or two to tens of thousands.

This event did not go unnoticed, and over the centuries, those who perished were termed the Holy Innocents. By the fifth century, a day of remembrance was being included in the church's annual calendar. Pictured in the church's art and

music, the event aroused a variety of passions as focus shifted from the children who died to the ones who killed them. In the modern world, Holy Innocents' Day has been associated with antiabortion, the cause of children who suffer from poverty and/or war, and children who live in unloving situations.

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches consider the children martyrs. As part of the liturgical changes during the Counter-Reformation, in 1568, Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572) elevated the importance of the remembrance day on the church's calendar.

Tradition teaches that the churches of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls and Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, the church of Saint Justina at Padua, and the cathedrals at Lisbon and Milan house relics of the Holy Innocents. In centuries past, as part of the overall Christmas festivities, churches in Great Britain, France, and Germany would elect a young boy who reigned for a day as a bishop and presided over the feast of Saint Nicholas (January 6) at which the Holy Innocents were acknowledged.

The Roman Church observes Holy Innocents' Day on December 28, while Eastern churches will observe it on December 27 or 29.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Epiphany; Holy Family, Feast of the; Joseph, Feast Day of St.; New Year's Day; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Holy Maries, Festival of the (La Fête des Saintes Maries) (May 24–25)

The Romany people of France (common called gypsies) tell two stories of Sara, their patron saint. In one version, Sara was the servant girl of Marie Jacobe, the sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the crucifixion of Jesus, Marie Jacobe and Marie Solomé, the mother of the apostles James and John, accompanied Jesus's followers from Bethany (Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary), Joseph of Arimathea, and Mary Magdalene out of Palestine. When the group reached the sea, they set sail, but

left Sara behind. Sara began to cry, and responding to her distress, Marie Jacobe cast her mantle upon the waves and drew her aboard their small boat. Sara, with the aid of an angel, then guided the boat to its final destination—Camargue, Provence (France). While the groups scattered, Marie Jacobe, Marie Salomé and Sara remained at the landing site and evangelized the local population.

In the other version of the story, Sara was a Romany queen. She welcomed the group that arrived from Palestine, and the two Maries baptized her. She introduced them to the other gypsy leaders and they converted them to Christianity. When they passed away, she saw to their burial on the site over which the Church of Notre Dame de la Mer would later be built. This site was also formerly used for Pagan worship. The relics of all three women are now believed to rest in the church. Since Sara was never canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, she is not considered an official saint. Her tomb is in the church's basement. Meanwhile, the relics of the two Maries rest in the upper chapel. Scenes of their life have been painted on their reliquary.

By the middle of May, Romany people from across Europe begin to head for Provence for the annual celebration of Sara (May 24) and the two Maries (May 25) at Notre Dame de la Mer. The area around the church turns into a massive campground, which becomes the site of informal gatherings, music, dance, and general frivolity.

The purpose of the pilgrimage, however, is to honor the two Maries and especially Sara, who is thought of as an Egyptian from whom the Gypsies get their popular appellation, and is seen as the mother of their community. They will find time during their visit to burn a candle as they kneel before her shrine. They will give the statue new clothes, and leave behind numerous items as offerings—thanks for prayer answered, hopes for prayers still awaiting a response.

On the first day of formal events, a statue of Sara is brought from its permanent resting place in the church basement to the main sanctuary and the reliquary of the two Maries also lowered from the upper chapel. As the reliquary is finding its place, members of the gathered congregation attempt to touch it. Songs to the two Maries introduce the Mass for the day. After the Mass, the statue of Sara is carried to the nearby seashore for a blessing ceremony.

On the second day, the statues of the two Maries will be carried to the sea for a similar blessing ceremony. The procession to the sea will be led by some young local girls in the traditional dress of the region. Following behind the statues will be the archbishop of Aix en Provence. He will conduct the ceremony blessing the waters that brought the two Maries to Provence from a boat just offshore.

The closing ceremonies back at the church will see Sara and the reliquary of the two Maries returned to their permanent resting spot, while the assembled chant:

Great Saintes Maries, we are about to leave you.
 Intercede for us before God
 So he will preserve our souls and bodies,
 So he will help us to be better.

Many will carry away water from the well that is in the center of the church. The water is believed to have curative powers.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Madeleine, Fête de la; Mary Magdalene, Day of the Holy.

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Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross (September 14)

The Feast of Triumph of the Cross, celebrated under a variety of variant names in different church bodies, celebrates the role of the cross as an instrument of human salvation, a theological fact that has found widespread expression in Christian piety. It is a frequent topic of Christian hymnody, as in the popular Protestant hymn, “Old Rugged Cross:”

On a hill far away
Stood an old rugged cross,
An emblem of suffering and shame;
But I love that old cross
Where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.
So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross
till my trophies at last I lay down,
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it some day for a crown.

The feast day, however, has a much more specific reference, being traced to the search for Christian relics in the Holy Land in the fourth century by Saint Helena (c. 248–c. 329), the mother of the emperor Constantine. In 326, she accompanied Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem (r. 312–334), to visit the many locations described in the Christian New Testament. Among the sites viewed, she was told that a specific rocky outcropping was the place where Jesus was crucified. In the second century, a temple to Venus (then already dismantled), had been constructed. Helena explored the rubble of the former Pagan temple site, and as recorded in the historical work of Rufinus (c. 345–410), discovered three crosses

(of the kind used by the Romans for executions). As they looked very much alike, she had no means of knowing which might be the cross upon which Jesus died. However, she took the recently discovered relics to a dying woman who resided nearby. She touched each one, and upon touching one, was instantly healed. Constantine ordered the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on this site. It would be dedicated in 335 at a two-day festival that began on September 13. The following day, the cross was brought outside the church so that the crowd of faithful who had gathered could view the relic and to venerate it. (In 614, The Persians who overran Jerusalem carried the relic away, though it was subsequently recaptured by the emperor Heraclius (r. 610–628). He took the cross to Constantinople, and then returned it to the church in the following year.)

Both the Roman Catholic Church (Congregation of Holy Cross) and the Episcopal Church (Order of the Holy Cross) have religious orders dedicated to the cross, for whom September 14 is a special feast day. The several Oriental Orthodox churches, such as the Armenian and the Ethiopian, have special multi-day celebrations of the cross in September. The Eastern Orthodox churches have possibly the most elaborate of celebrations of the cross, with the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-creating Cross on September 14 being a mandatory fast day, which is preceded by a forefeast day and followed by an eight-day afterfeast. During the Exaltation liturgy, the cross will be moved about the sanctuary and lifted up to call the faithful's attention to its presence. In stark contrast, most Protestant and post-Protestant churches, while revering the cross as the instrument of salvation, have abandoned any special day for focusing upon it. They have also generally rejected the veneration of relics, know little or nothing of Saint Helena, and do not believe that fragments of the True Cross still exist. Thus, for them, September 14 has no special significance on the church calendar.

The Russian Orthodox Church holds a slightly related but unique commemoration of the True Cross on October 12. Over the centuries, the Knights of Malta, a Christian military order, had obtained a piece of the True Cross, which left the island following the Napoleonic invasion in 1798. The following year, he saw to the presentation of the relic to the Russian czar Paul I (r. 1796–1801), at a ceremony held on October 12 in the imperial residence of Gatchina near St. Petersburg. The relic was taken out of the country following the 1917 revolution, and eventually became the property of Yugoslavian ruler Alexander I (r. 1921–1934). It disappeared in 1941 on the eve of the Nazi invasion, and this particular fragment of the cross has not been seen since.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Elevation of the True Cross; Procession of the Cross.

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Holy Saturday. See Holy Week

Holy Thursday. See Maundy Thursday

Holy Week

Holy Week for Christians worldwide commemorates the last week of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. It covers the events of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the last supper, the arrest, and his death by crucifixion. Beginning with the sixth Sunday of Lent, Holy Week includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. Two lesser observed days of this week are Spy Wednesday and Holy Saturday.

The earliest reference to Holy Week observances appear in the writings of the *Pilgrimage of Ætheria* in fourth-century Jerusalem. From this time forward, we have records of Christians from all over the world taking pilgrimages to Jerusalem to participate in rites and reenact the final events of Christ's life. Eventually, distinct practices for each special day of Holy Week spread throughout wider Christian world.

Palm Sunday

The first of Holy Week celebrations, Palm Sunday focuses on Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he was heralded as Messianic king. Worship services include blessing of the palms outside the church and a procession into the church with participants waving the palm branches and singing songs of celebration.

Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday)

Holy Thursday revolves around the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples and consequently commemorates the institution of the Eucharist (Communion). As well, according to John 13, Jesus washed the disciples' feet during the meal. He then commanded them to wash one another's feet. Consequently, Maundy Thursday incorporates the rite of foot washing in many denominations. The term "maundy" comes from the Latin *mandatum* (c.f. the English "*mandate*") in John 13:34, referring to the new commandment Jesus gives his disciples to love one another as he loves them.

After Maundy Thursday services, it is customary in some church traditions to remove all of the altar coverings and decorations. Crosses are also removed or veiled until the Easter Sunday morning. As well, Maundy Thursday begins what is known as the "Easter Triduum," a three-day period devoted to special prayer and observance that runs through Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Good Friday

On this day, the church commemorates Jesus's arrest, trial, crucifixion and suffering, death, and burial. It is traditionally a day of fasting, and the Eucharist is not celebrated. Liturgies will often focus on the "Seven Last Words of Christ" and follow the "Stations of the Cross." Crosses remain veiled and the altar remains completely bare, without decorations, texts, candlesticks, or altar cloths.

Another common service for Good Friday is *Tenebrae* (Latin for "shadows" or "darkness"). Sometimes this term is applied generally to all evening church services on the last three days of Holy Week. More specifically, however, it is used of the "Service of Darkness" or "Service of Shadows" held in the evening of Good Friday.

Holy Week, and thus Lent, ends on the evening of Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday morning thus marks the beginning of a new period in the liturgical calendar.

In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, Holy Week is marked with church services almost every day from Palm Sunday to Easter. In predominantly Roman Catholic churches, there are a host of special weeklong national and regional celebrations of Holy Week (known as *Semana Santa* in Spanish-speaking countries). Protestant Churches vary widely, with some, like the Anglicans, approaching the Catholic and Orthodox churches in their frequency and intensity, while others recognize only Good Friday and/or Maundy Thursday, and still others, especially the Free churches, have abandoned special services during Holy Week.

Kevin Quast

See also Easter; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Good Friday; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Lent; Maundy Thursday; Palm Sunday; Passover.

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Hosay Festival (Trinidad). See Ashura

Hoshana Rabbah. See Sukkot

Hoshi Matsuri (February 11)

Hoshi Matsuri (Star festival), the Great Fire Festival, is the largest annual event of the Agon Shu, a Japanese Vajrayana Buddhist group with roots in Shingon Buddhism. In the 1970s, Seiyu Kiriyaama Kancho, the founder of Agon Shu, came to believe that the Agon (or Agama, in Sanskrit) sutras contained the original teachings concerning the path to Buddhahood (enlightenment) and ultimate salvation as given by Buddha. The Great Fire Festival has its roots in the practice of Esoteric Buddhists, especially among the mountain ascetics, who in earlier centuries would throw *gomagi* (wooden sticks upon which prayers requests were written) into bonfires as a ritual supporting the realization of the requests.

The Fire Festival is a daylong event held at the Angon Shui facilities on Yamashina hill in Kyoto. Here, two large bonfires are built before the altar. The *gomagi* with prayers for the living are placed on one of the bonfires, while those for the deceased go on the other. Those for the deceased are primarily prayer for their souls to be released from what Buddhists consider the lower or hell realms. Those in the lower realms can torment the living; thus it is deemed important to work for their liberation.

The ritual begins with the entrance of the leadership, who wear the clothing of the yamabushi (mountain ascetics who practice Esoteric Buddhism). After the leader of Agon Shu blesses the fire and calls upon the compassion of Lord Buddha, the yamabushi will place the *gomagi* on the fire as ritual chanting proceeds.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Great Buddha Festival; Tens of Thousands of Lanterns Ancestral Memorial Service.

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Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron (March 13)

The birthday of founder L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) is the high point of the year for the members of the Church of Scientology. Hubbard, a writer, former naval officer, and explorer, brought a decade of intense consideration of the plight of humankind into his 1950 publication, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, which presented his alternative conclusions about the human mind and the way to health and wholeness as opposed to the findings of contemporary psychology. Further work on the exploration of the inner self led him



Science fiction author and Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard addresses an audience of *Dianetics* auditors in 1951.

to a reorientation on the human spirit, which he termed the “Thetan,” and by 1954, he had begun to articulate the basics of Scientology and the first local Scientology church was founded.

Scientology is a Western Esoteric religion. It posits the essential self as the soul or spirit, believes that the Thetan is trapped in the body due to its forgetfulness of its own past, and offered Scientology as the method by which the Thetan can be freed to realize its full potential. Hubbard is credited with discovering the best and most efficient means of freeing the Thetan, and is thus seen as having made one of the most important discoveries in human history. In addition, Hubbard is seen as a Renaissance man, accomplished in a variety of fields from music to corporate management and educational theory. Along with Scientology nar-

rowly defined, Hubbard is held up for his contributions in a variety of fields.

On or slightly before Hubbard’s birthday each year, church leadership organize a church-wide celebration that begins with a large gathering at the International Flag Land Base (where the higher levels of Scientology teachings are presented to members), in Clearwater, Florida. During this two- to three-hour meeting, through talks by the international leadership and audiovisual presentations, Hubbard’s life is celebrated and new Scientology publications announced and formally released. Highlighting each celebration are reports of recent accomplishments by various units of the church, which are presented as “gifts” to Hubbard, an occurrence that grew out of a response to a question put to him informally about what he might like for a birthday gift. The event in Clearwater is then recorded, duplicated, and disseminated to all of the local Scientology churches around the world, each of which organizes an L. Ron Hubbard Birthday Party to which members and friends of the church are invited and at which the DVD of the Clearwater event is shared. The local birthday events are approximately a week after the Clearwater gathering.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Auditor’s Day; *Dianetics*, Anniversary of; International Association of Scientologists Anniversary; Maiden Voyage Anniversary; National Founding Day (Scientology); New Year’s Eve (Scientology); Scientology, Holidays of the Church of; Sea Org Day.

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HumanLight (December 23)

Through the last decades of the 20th century, as the United States diversified religiously, and the idea of celebrating the winter holidays emerged with the popularization of various alternatives to the celebration of Christmas (Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Yule) were posed by various religious communities, some Unbelievers suggested several appropriate ways to celebrate the holiday season in a manner appropriate to those who held to a secular worldview.

Among the several options posed by the beginning of the 21st century, Joseph Fox and Gary Brill, two members of the New Jersey Humanist network, suggested HumanLight as an appropriate holiday to promote and celebrate the ideas and ideals of Humanism during the winter holiday season. In particular, it draws attention to a Humanist vision of a positive future in which people can identify, care for and behave morally toward one another. The first HumanLight celebration was held in 2001.

December 23 was chosen for HumanLight celebrations with the double consideration of selecting a date during the peak celebration time of the winter holiday season, which did not coincide exactly with other celebrations of other holidays—Winter Solstice, Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. Many Humanists join with non-Humanist family and friends at different holiday events.

HumanLight originators purposely set only a minimum of guidelines for the celebration of the holiday in the hope that it would become a time to express creativity. They suggest that it be a time to emphasize Humanist values, that it not be critical of other winter holidays or the beliefs of those celebrating them, and that provisions be made for the inclusion of children. Common to celebrations have been gift giving and a candlelighting ceremony that includes candles symbolizing reason, compassion, and hope.

HumanLight found a very positive response from Humanists connected with such organizations as the American Humanist Association, the council for secular humanism, the Society for Ethical Culture, and even the Unitarian Universalist Association. Its celebration has spread across North America and into Europe through the network provided by the International Humanist and Ethical Union. The promotion of the holiday is now focused by the HumanLight Web site, <http://humanlight.org/>. As a specifically Humanist holiday, HumanLight only partially competes with Festivus, an older holiday for Unbelievers in general.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); Festivus; Hanukkah; Winter Solstice.

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Human Rights Day (December 10)

Human Rights Day, observed around the world on December 10, celebrates the proclamation by the UN General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948. On December 2, 1950, the General Assembly declared December 10 to be Human Rights Day and invited all of the member nations and other organizations to observe it as they saw fit.

The UDHR attempted to articulate a set of rights to which all human beings were entitled. Three articles speak especially to religious issues.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

The UDHR has received overwhelming, but by no means universal support. Among those dissenting especially from the religious statements have been Islamic countries, some of whom have suggested that it was written without reference to the situation in Islamic countries. On June 30, 2000, the member nations of the Organization of the Islamic Conference issued an alternative statement, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, which declared that people have the "freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah [Islamic law]." The Cairo document sidesteps the issues of freedom of religion and gender equality, the two issues in the forefront of Muslim conflict with the non-Muslim world.

In contrast to the Islamic world, the Humanist community has seen itself in almost complete agreement with the UDHR and can point to resonance between



Street children gather together for a Human Rights Day rally organized by the L. Ron Hubbard Scientology Foundation in Calcutta, India, on December 10, 2006. (AP/Wide World Photos)

the declaration and the several Humanist manifestos issued periodically through the 20th century. In 2004, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the global organization through which Humanists cooperate and act, endorsed Human Rights Day as an official day for Humanist celebration.

Among Christians, Church Women United, an international Protestant ecumenical organization, promotes the celebration of Human Rights Day and encourages its constituent groups to annually present a human rights award to an activist in their community.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Freethought Day; HumanLight; National Day of Reason; World Humanist Day.

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Hyakujo Day Observance (January 17)

Baizhang Huaihai (720–814), known in Japan as Hyakujo Ekai, was a Chinese master of Ch’an Buddhism who lived during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). He was the teacher of Linji Yixuan (d. 866). Baizhang is most remembered for a saying attributed to him, “One day not work, one day not eat.” This saying was crucial to the Rinzai Zen tradition, though the full set of accompanying rules for Zen monasteries traditionally attributed to Baizhang were compiled at a later time. In any case, working, especially at farming, assisted the Rinzai Zen centers to survive at a much higher rate in times when Buddhism fell from official favor, as opposed to those groups that based their economics on donations.

Along with Linji, Baizhang is one of two figures in Zen history who are remembered with special observations by Rinzai Zen practitioners. The commemoration of him, under his Japanese name on Hyakujo Day, is held annually at Rinzai centers in Japan and throughout the world. They focus upon his role as a teacher of Linji.

Rinzai Zen Buddhists, never known for staging elaborate ceremonies or celebrations, commemorate Baizhang’s life and work with a special ceremony, held at many locations globally, through which practitioners acknowledge their gratitude for his teachings.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bodhidharma Day; Linji/Rinzai Day Observance.

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Id al-Adha

Id al-Adha, or Days of Sacrifice, is a Muslim holiday celebrated for four days during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah. It celebrates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham (called Ibrahim by Muslims) to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims also honor Ibrahim, though their telling of the story varies somewhat from that found in the biblical book of Genesis, where Abraham as an old man finally became the father to a son by his wife Sarah. When Isaac has grown to be a young boy, God ordered Abraham to build an altar and kill Isaac. Abraham is about to comply when his hand is stayed and a ram supplied in its place.

In the Qur'an, much more attention is paid to Ibrahim's relation to his first son by the servant Hagar, Ismail. He is believed to have accompanied Ibrahim on a visit to Mecca, where they fixed in place the Kaaba, the cubical structure inside the great mosque in Mecca toward which Muslims pray daily (Qur'an 2:125). Muslims also believe that it was Ismail, not Isaac, who was the son almost sacrificed by Ibrahim.

Because a ram appeared to be sacrificed in his son's place, when commemorating this event, Muslims sacrifice an animal to be eaten. They subsequently share a third of the meat with the poor, a third with friends and family, and keep a third for their own feast. The animals for the sacrifice are sheep, goats, cattle, or camels. The sacrifice must be made during the Days of Sacrifice, and verses in both the Qur'an and the Hadith indicate the obligatory nature of the sacrifice for all except the poor. The animal must be in good condition—not maimed. Also, the hide must be disposed of properly—one cannot sell it and pocket the money. In the end, the purpose of the holiday is to provide another vehicle for the wealth of the society to be shared with the less fortunate.

Ibrahim's act of obedience is also remembered during the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca required of Muslims at least once in their life. During the Hajj, pilgrims pass a site where Iblis (or Satan) attempted to dissuade Ibrahim from making the sacrifice at least three times. Each attempt by Satan is designated with a symbolic pillar. As they pass these pillars, they will throw stones at them.

James A. Beverley

See also Hajj; Id al-Fitr; Ramadan.

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Id al-Fitr

Id al-Fitr, or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, is a Muslim feast day that celebrates the end of the Ramadan fast. It is considered a most important yearly festival, second only to Id al-Adha. The three-day festival begins with the start of the month of Shawwal of the Islamic calendar, when the new moon is sighted. In Muslim-majority countries, the first day and sometimes the second day of Id al-Fitr is a public holiday.

During Ramadan, individuals prepare for the holiday by setting aside resources for a donation called *zakat al-fitr* or *zakat Ramadan*. Toward the end of Ramadan, they will give their offering to the needy so that they will be able to participate in the festival that is about to occur.

On the morning after the end of Ramadan, Muslims will attend a communal prayer gathering in the early morning, usually held in the open air, but it may also be held at a mosque, where they listen to a sermon by the imam on the season. After prayers and greeting one's neighbors, people return to their home for their first daytime meal in a month, the formal breaking of the fast.

After the meal, it is time to visit extended family and friends. Many don new clothes. In some countries, it is an occasion for exchanging gifts. It is a chance to enjoy foods that have not been a part of the diet for the last month. Above all it is an occasion to celebrate the mercy of Allah.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Ides of March. See Hilaria

Image Not-Made-by-Hands, Feast of the (August 16)

The Image Not-Made-by-Hands was a much-heralded icon in the Eastern Church during the first millennium of the Christian era. Tradition traced the icon to the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus. The ruler of the Syrian city of Edessa named Abgar, having heard of Jesus's miracles, hoped Jesus could heal him of his leprosy. He sent a letter with his court painter named Ananias requesting Jesus to come to Edessa. He also asked Ananias to paint an image of Jesus. Ananias was unable to fulfill Abgar's request, but Jesus reputedly wiped his face with a towel and gave it to Ananias. On the towel was the image of Jesus's face.

Jesus then sent the towel and a letter to Abgar. The letter promised the arrival of one of Jesus's disciples in Edessa, and with the towel, Abgar began to be healed of his leprosy. A short time later, Thaddeus, one of the seventy (Luke 10:1), baptized Abgar and established the church in Edessa. Abgar placed the image over the city gates for all to see, and it remained in place for many years. As the story goes, however, a descendant fell into idolatry and made plans to remove the image. Learning of the plot, the bishop of the city concealed it. Knowledge of its existence was eventually lost.

Centuries passed. In 545, King Chroses I of Persia besieged Edessa. While everyone expected the city to fall, the then-bishop of Edessa, Evlavios, had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in which he was told of the image and how to retrieve it from its hiding place. He then led a procession around the city with the cross and the Image Not-Made-with-Hands around the city walls. For whatever reason, the Persian army departed. The image subsequently was venerated in the city. Fifteen years later a Muslim Arab army took the city, but did not interfere with veneration of the Image.

In 944, the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (912–959) asked that the image be transferred to Constantinople. This relocation of the image was done with great pomp, and upon arriving in the city, was on August 16 placed in the Pharos Church of the Most-Holy Theotokos, where it would remain for several centuries. However, between the sacking of the city by the Crusaders in 1204 and the fall of the city to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, it disappeared, at least from Constantinople.

One account suggests that the Image Not-Made-by-Hands was taken to Genoa about 1362 and now is located at the Church of Saint Bartholomew of the Armenians, the result of Byzantine emperor John V Palaeologus (1332–1391) having donated it to Genoa's Doge Leonardo Montaldo. Others suggest that the image was taken to Rome, where it remained until 1870 in the church of San Silvestro in Capite; it was afterward moved to the Matilda chapel in the Vatican Palace, where it remains to the present. Still another story suggests that in 1241, Baldwin II of Constantinople (1217–1273) sold the image to French king Louis IX (1214–1270) who placed it in the Sainte Chapelle in Paris from whence it was lost during the French Revolution.

While various articles that claim to be the image are assessed in the West, in the East, the Feast of the Image Not-Made-by-Hands is one of the August observances in the Orthodox churches beginning with the Process of the Cross on August 1 and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on August 14 (according to the Julian calendar).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Czestochowa, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Perpetual Help, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Imbolc (February 1–2)

Imbolc is the modern Pagan/Wiccan festival marking the halfway point between the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, and the spring equinox, when the day and night are of equal length. By the beginning of February, the regular lengthening of the days since the solstice becomes noticeable. In ages past, this day would mark the time to begin making the plans for the growing season that would begin to be implemented after the spring equinox.

Imbolc is a time to focus upon the goddess in her youthful maiden aspect. There are a variety of ancient stories and practices that supply content for the celebration. One is the Greek story of Persephone (or Kore), the queen of the underworld, who spends half the year in the underworld with Hades, during which time the earth becomes barren. Imbolc is her time to return and for new life to burst forth.

The Gaelic goddess Brigid is celebrated at Imbolc, and was said to bring the initial stirrings of spring to the land. She would later be superseded by Saint Brigid, an Irish saint whose feast day was set on February 2. Christians also know this day as Candlemas, a day for blessing new candles that would be used for lighting the house through the year. For modern Pagans, the ritual may include the entrance of a young woman with a wreath of candles on her head or carrying one or more candles in her hand. She would enter the ritual in response to an invocation of the goddess by the assembled celebrants.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St.; Eostara; Fall Equinox; Lammas; Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice.

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Immaculate Conception, Feast of the (December 8)

While often confused with the belief in the Virgin birth of Jesus, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is related to the conception and birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is an outgrowth of the emphasis on the Virgin's role in human salvation that began with her designation of as *Theotokos* or Mother of God in the fifth century. The emphasis on Mary grew over the centuries in the Western Church and became a major theme of papal pronouncements through the 19th and 20th centuries.

The favor with which the idea was being received was indicated in 1476, when a feast honoring the Immaculate Conception to be celebrated on December 8 was added to the Latin church's calendar by Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–1484). A century later, the Council of Trent reiterated the status of the dogma as one still under consideration and thus subject to debate and further development. It would not be until 1854 that Pope Pius IX would assert it as a dogma for Roman Catholics. As defined, the dogma states that Mary, by virtue of her unique calling and based upon the merits of Christ, was preserved from the moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Anne free from any taint of original sin. She was also filled with God's grace. The doctrine implies some understanding of sin as being passed in the physical acts of conception and birth.

Just four years later, Bernadette Soubirous (1844–1879), a young teenage girl in southern France, claimed to have had apparitions of the Virgin who appeared to her as the Immaculate Conception, a sophisticated concept many believed beyond the comprehension of the teenager. The apparitions were later seen as confirming the new dogma and the new dogma as sanctioning the apparitions.

The doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception is not shared by other Christian churches, including the Eastern Orthodox churches, which share a significantly high view of the Virgin Mary. Eastern Orthodox Christians generally believe Mary to be an important person in the plan of salvation and the one who nurtured Jesus and lived an exemplary life; however, they do not share the same ideas concerning the nature of sin and how it is passed from generation to generation. Protestants in general have not considered Mary elevated above other Christians and do not have

a practice of venerating saints, even those seen as most exemplary. While a few Anglo-Catholics, those members of the Anglican Communion who most wish for a reunion with Roman Catholicism, may believe the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the overwhelming majority of Protestants would deny most statements about Mary made by Roman Catholics beyond the idea of her being a virgin when Jesus was born (including her perpetual virginity, assumption into heaven, and immaculate conception).

Meanwhile, December 8 has become an important date in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, being one of four main Marian holidays annually. Even prior to its being named a dogma, Roman Catholics had proclaimed Mary as the Immaculate Conception as the patroness of the United States and, in the 20th century, erected a National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Even earlier, some fishermen praying to Mary discovered a statue of the Immaculate Conception which subsequently became the center of the nation's devotion to Mary. The Statue, called "Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida," is now kept in a large shrine in the town of Aparecida, in São Paulo. Mary as the Immaculate Conception is also the patron saint of Brazil.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aparecida, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of.

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Immaculate Heart of Mary, Feast of the

In the gospel of Luke, attention was called to Mary's heart, a symbol of her inner life, when it was noted that Mary observed Jesus and kept all that she observed and heard in her heart. In Roman Catholic theology, there is an understanding of Mary as having a love of God, her son Jesus, and then of the whole of humanity. Consideration of the heart of Mary would make note of the seven sorrows of Mary (negative experiences in her earthly life) denoted in Catholic theology, such as her having to leave Nazareth for Egypt, Jesus being lost in Jerusalem, seeing Jesus on the cross, etc. From experiencing the seven sorrows, Mary has become fully

aligned to Jesus's purpose for the world and has a concern for the human condition and the need for salvation.

Jean Eudes (d. 1681) launched an effort to propagate devotion to the Sacred (or Immaculate) Heart of Mary in his book *The Admirable Heart*. He also celebrated a Mass using the language of Mary's sacred heart. He saw the devotion spread across the country. He was unable, however, to gain papal approval, though he received no negative reaction from Rome. Through the next century, unofficial devotion continued. In 1799, finally, a feast was authorized for the Sacred Heart of Mary to be held on the second Sunday after Pentecost, the day following the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. By the mid-1850s, approval was granted to the Office and Mass of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. After the declaration of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854, the term Immaculate Heart gradually replaced Sacred Heart.

Devotion to the Heart of Mary received significant support in the 20th century in several apparitions of the Virgin, first at Lourdes, then Fatima. The Virgin at Fatima in 1917 asked that Russia be consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a united act by the pope and all the bishops. In 1942, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) consecrated the world (without mentioning Russia specifically) to the Immaculate Heart. Two years later, he set the Feast of the Immaculate Heart on the calendar for the entire church. In 1952, he consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart, but did not invite the bishops to participate.

In 1982, following the assassination attempt on the anniversary of the first Fatima apparition, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) visited Fatima, and while there, again consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart. Then in 1984, he had the statue of Mary from Fatima brought to Rome, where he led a service re-consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This time he asked all the world's bishops to join him in this action.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Sacred Heart of Jesus, Feast of the.

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Indivisible Day (July 4)

Unbelievers in the United States have felt alienated from actions taken by governmental bodies and officials reflective of the dominating influence of Christianity throughout the nation. Among the most offensive realities with which they must live has been the addition of the words “under God” to the oft-repeated Pledge of Allegiance, which they see as a breach of the basic principle of separation of church and state. They emphasize the secular nature of the Constitution and of the government formed by the country’s Founding Fathers.

In 1998, a peculiar political situation in the state of Minnesota allowed an independent candidate for governor, the former professional wrestler Jesse Ventura (b. 1951) to win election as the state’s governor (1999–2003). Ventura had become a critic of conservative forms of religion, which he found to be attempting to force their religion on others. He acted on that belief, and the freedom of people to choose their own or no religion, in 2002 by using his position to declare July 4, Independence Day, when most Americans celebrate the founding of the nation, as Indivisible Day. His new name for the celebration of the founding of the country came from the Pledge of Allegiance, which affirms “one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Ventura emphasized the secularity of the government, allowed a people of all worldviews to “coexist in harmony, undivided by sectarian strife.” He concluded by affirming, “Eternal vigilance must be maintained to guard against those who seek to stifle ideas, establish a narrow orthodoxy, and divide our nation along arbitrary lines of race, ethnicity, and religious belief or non-belief.”

The original proclamation set only July 1, 2002, as Indivisible Day and a celebration only for the state of Minnesota. However, some Unbelievers have picked up the celebration and made it an annual occasion for atheists and Freethinkers. It has provided a means of avoiding expressions of civil religion that mix piety and patriotism in some local Independence Day celebrations and an added occasion to protest the recently added reference to God in the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 2010, in the weeks before Independence Day, the Charlotte Atheists and Agnostics, an atheist group in North Carolina, took out a set of billboard advertisements across the state that read “One Nation, Indivisible.” A few days prior to the July 4 holiday, they awoke to find that the words “Under God” had been written on the billboard located on the Billy Graham Parkway.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; Freethought Day; National Day of Reason.

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Indra Jatra

Indra Jatra is a popular Hindu festival of Nepal best known for the many dances that are performed during its eight days of celebration. The main focus of festivities is Hanuman Dhoka (a complex of buildings) in Kathmandu. The first day of the festival is marked by the erection of a large wooden pole, made from a tree that grew in the forest at Baktapur, in front of the Royal Palace at Hanuman Dhoka, the purpose being the celebration of the deity Indra's coming visit, and as a propitiation to him as the “god of rain.” The program of dancing begins soon after the pole goes up. The festival's spectrum of dancing continues throughout the week, highlighted by the Procession of Living Goddess—Mahakali (Kali) and Mahalaxmi (Lakshmi), and Dasha Avatara based on the 10 incarnations of Vishnu.

The third day of the festival sees the appearance of the goddess Kumari, the mother deity Durga as a young girl, who is processed through the city in a chariot. In Nepal, Durga is commonly called Teleju. She will be joined by the deities, Bhairav (or Shiva) and Ganesh (the elephant-faced deity and Shiva's son). Durga, as Parvati, is Shiva's spouse. The king of Nepal will join the festival at this point and pay his honors to the deities.

The festival concludes with the lowering of the pole erected on the opening day, which occurs on the last evening. The festival begins on the 12th day of the Hindu month of Bhādrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar).

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See also Dasain; Mahashivaratri; Navaratri.

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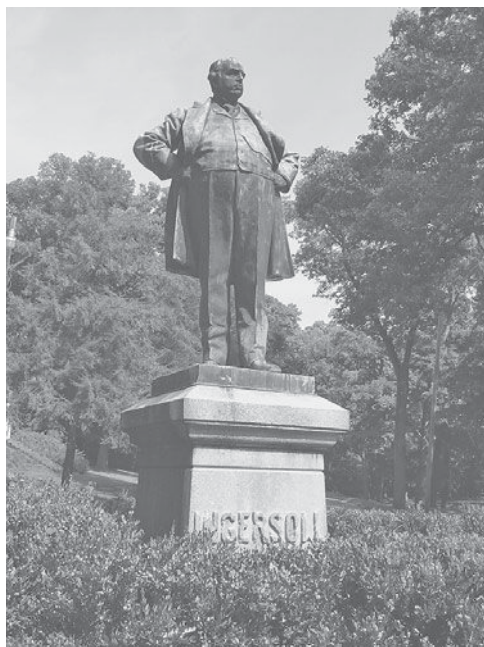
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Ingersoll Day (August 11)

Freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll (1833–1899), a lawyer best remembered as one of the great orators of the late 19th century, holds a unique place in American religious history. He emerged as one of the most popular public lecturers of his day



This statue of agnostic and public speaker Robert Green Ingersoll stands in Peoria, Illinois. His birthday has become an annual celebration for agnostics and Unbelievers. (J. Gordon Melton)

and did so while including among his speeches a number emphasizing his sharp dissent from the better-known Western religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Though during his lifetime, only a minority of the American population (about a third) were church members, Christianity was the dominating force in the religious community and exerted an influence beyond its numbers. Nevertheless, his lectures such as “Some Mistakes of Moses” and “Why I Am an Agnostic” were often repeated as he traveled throughout the country and frequently reprinted and circulated in his books.

Though claimed by all Unbelievers in the 21st century, Ingersoll was best termed a Freethinker and self-identified as an agnostic. He was not the founder or even a member of any

Freethinkers’ organizations of his day but developed friendship circles that included other notable skeptics and Freethinkers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Walt Whitman, Thomas Edison, and Mark Twain.

The contemporary celebration of Ingersoll’s life has been given focus by the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, a committee of the Council for Secular Humanism, founded at the end of the 1970s. His statue in Peoria, Illinois, sites associated with him in Washington, D.C., and his birthplace (now a museum) in upstate New York have all become pilgrimage sites for Unbelievers.

Over the last generation, Ingersoll Day has also emerged as an annual celebration held on August 11, Ingersoll’s birthday, as an opportunity for Unbelievers to celebrate the life and works of the popular Freethinker whose works still set much of the Unbelief agenda with religion.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Freethought Day.

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I'n-Lon-Schka

I'n-Lon-Schka is an annual dance ceremony among the Native American Osage people. The ceremony can be traced to the 1800s. The Osage first contacted Europeans in 1673 in what is now Vernon County, Missouri, and at one time held sway over land now included in Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas. A set of treaties with the U.S. government through the early 19th century culminated in the treaty of 1868 in which the Osage moved to a new permanent home in Indian Territory (Oklahoma). At this time, 3,000 people moved from their land in Kansas.

The move to Oklahoma meant the disruption of the cycle of religious celebration, and as some religious practices were lost, new ones were adopted to fill the void. The I'n-Lon-Schka dance was developed from similar dances among the Ponca and Kansa peoples but adapted to Osage culture. I'n-Lon-Schka literally means "playground of the eldest son," and it honors an eldest son in each village who also serves as the drumkeeper of the ceremonial drum used in the celebration. Each of the three Osage villages has its own drum, which remains in its own location, not to be removed from the community.

The I'n-Lon-Schka dances occur on three weekends each June in each of the three villages. It requires an organization that includes many people, and participants include singers, dancers, and the drummer. The ceremony begins in the burning of cedar wood and opening prayers. During the weekend, more than 100 different songs will be heard, a variety of dances performed, and much food consumed.

On occasion, a change in the drummer occurs. This transfer of responsibility begins with a "Passing of the Drum" ceremony during the I'n-Lon-Schka one year to be followed a year later by an "Acceptance of the Drum" ceremony a year later. To be eligible for this honored post, the person who becomes the new drummer must be the eldest son of his father.

The I'n-Lon-Schka originated among the group's warriors and was strictly a male event. Youth and men were introduced to the circle of dancers in a formal ceremony in which headdresses are placed on their heads. Since the end of World War II, women have been admitted as participants.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Acorn Feast; First Salmon Rites.

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International Association of Scientologists Anniversary (October 7)

The International Association of Scientologists (IAS) was formed in 1984 at Saint Hill Manor in East Grimstead, Sussex, England, following a major crisis in the Church of Scientology's life in 1979–1980 and a resulting in a complete reorganization of the church at the international level beginning in 1981. The church was also in the midst of a variety of court cases in which its status as a religious body was continuously being called into question. Above and beyond its ongoing battle with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, the church faced a growing number of civil suits in the United States. A former member in Oregon had brought a high-profile civil suit and had won an initial multimillion-dollar judgment, complaining she had been defrauded into believing the church's teachings. In Europe, the church faced government investigations challenging the church's *bona fides*.

Church members and leaders came to believe that additional resources were needed to assist the church in establishing itself as a bona fide religion, specifically to unite Scientologists, who tend to be very individualistic, on an international level mobilized to fight for human rights and religious freedom. Overturning the trial verdict in the Oregon case was counted as an initial major victory. More recently, the IAS has been credited for its effort to secure national religious recognition in various European countries, especially Spain and Sweden, and the favorable decisions recognizing the church's *bona fides* handed down by the European Court of Human Rights.

The IAS issued a "Pledge to Mankind" in which it called upon church members and men of goodwill "to continue the quest for a new civilization where honest men have rights and freedom abound." It also asked people to join IAS and to sign the pledge, which included as its goal, "A civilization without insanity, without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights and where man is free to rise to greater heights." In succeeding years, Scientology has been involved in a variety of legal battles, defending itself against claims of damages by former members, asserting its right to exist as a church in several European countries, gaining tax exemption in the United States, defending its copyrights from what it has considered a variety of efforts to subvert them, and opposing incidents of perceived slander and libel.

Each year on the anniversary of its formation, the IAS holds a celebrative gathering at which a status report on the present situation relative to its goals is offered, Freedom Awards are handed out to those who have been especially prominent in specific efforts relative to defending Scientology, and reports are highlighted of grants given by IAS to different organizations involved in ongoing issues. Accounts of this annual gathering appear in the organization's magazine, *Impact*.

As many (though by no means all) of the major concerns that initially produced the IAS were resolved, the focus has changed somewhat. In the 21st century, the organization has seen its major task as the spreading of Scientology globally, and changing conditions on the planet in general for the better. This latter goal has seen it making grants working to support the social betterment organizations that have been founded by Scientologists and that are now sponsored by the church, such as Narconon and the Way to Happiness Foundation, as well as supporting the church corps of volunteer ministers who have been active in the response to natural disasters.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (November)

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church was first proclaimed in 1996 by Open Doors, a evangelical Christian organization founded to facilitate the work of Andrew van der Bijl (b. 1928), better known simply as Brother Andrew, a Christian missionary who became interested in the fate of Christians caught in the years after World War II behind the Iron Curtain. Though best known for smuggling the Bible into Russia, he generally tried to raise the conscience of Western Christians to the plight of Christian communities in a growing number of countries where, for a variety of reasons, Christians were not allowed to worship freely and/or evangelize openly. Beside the many places where governments moved to suppress the Christian movement, in the postcolonial period, many Christians faced popular reprisals for real or imagined grievances due to actions against other religions during the colonial years.

The concern of Christians in the West for persecuted Christian communities around the world grew through the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, a set of new organizations emerged that see themselves as their spokespersons. In the mid-1990s, Open Doors created a coalition of these organizations, and together they have annually promoted the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted church, usually on a Sunday in November.

On this day, the Christian community is asked to pray for believers around the world suffering from persecution simply for their faith in Christ. Sponsoring organizations (as of 2010) include Christian Freedom International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Christians in Crisis, Compassion Radio, Fishhook International, Gospel for Asia, Greater Calling, International Christian Concern, Iranian Christians International, Jubilee Campaign, Mission India, Open Doors, Persecution Project Foundation, the Voice of the Martyrs, World Bible Translation Center, World Evangelical Alliance, and the Last Harvest. Support comes primarily from the Evangelical Protestant community in North America and Europe.

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See also Common Prayer Day; International Religious Freedom Day; National Day of Prayer; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; World Day of Prayer.

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International Religious Freedom Day (October 23)

In 1998, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed the International Religious Freedom Act setting up the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, whose assigned task was the monitoring of the state of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief around the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments were cited as the standards for judging the current state of affairs. The commission was also to make an annual report on its findings with recommendations to the president, the secretary of state, and the Congress. These annual reports have served regularly to raise the issue of religious freedom, especially as it relates to American foreign policy.

The Commission's reports led in 2003 to the Senate passing a resolution designating October 27, 2003, the fifth anniversary of the signing of the International Religious Freedom Act, as International Religious Freedom Day. The bill had the initial sponsorship of more than 20 senators representing the broadest spectrum of positions, from the most conservative of Republicans to the most liberal of Democrats.

The resolution cited a variety of documents proclaiming religious freedom a right of all people, including the "Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief," adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1981 and Article 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In their resolution, the Senate requested that the president issue a proclamation calling for a renewed commitment to eliminating violations of the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion and protecting fundamental human rights; and calling upon the people of the United States and interested groups and organizations to observe International Religious Freedom Day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

Though not referenced in the legislation creating International Religious Freedom Day, October 27, 1659, was the day William Robinson and Marmaduke Stephenson, two members of the Society of Friends, were executed in Boston, Massachusetts, for refusing to give up their religious beliefs.

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See also International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church; Religious Freedom Day.

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Into Raymi Fiesta. See Summer Solstice

■ Islam

Islam is a monotheistic faith that claims Allah (the term for God in Arabic) has revealed himself supremely through the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE) and in the Qu’ran, the holy book of Islam given to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe that Islam dates back to the creation of humanity and that Allah has spoken through a lineage of prophets that includes Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Islam has traditionally taught that Muhammad and the prophets that preceded him were kept from sin by Allah. His prophetic status secured the truth of the revelation he received and made him a model for future generations. Muslims also look to the traditions about him (known as *hadith*) for guidance in belief and practice in all areas of life.

Islam is now the second-largest religion in the world, second only to Christianity. As of 2005, there were 1.4 billion followers, almost one in six people on Earth. It is the majority faith across Northern Africa, through the Middle East, and eastward across southern Asia to Indonesia, the latter now the nation with the largest Muslim population.



An ancient Mauritanian edition of the Qur'an, the holy book of the religion of Islam. (Larry Sampas)

Muhammad the Prophet

Understanding Islam demands singular focus on the traditional version of Muhammad’s life as accepted by most Muslims. It is generally accepted that Muhammad was born about 570 CE. His father died before he was born, and his mother died shortly after his birth. After his grandfather’s death two years later, Muhammad was cared for by an uncle until his teen years.

Muhammad married his first wife Khadijah in 595. She bore him at least six children (including two boys who died early). While Muhammad later took multiple wives, he did not do so until after Khadijah’s death in 619.

Islam traces God’s call to Muhammad to the 17th night of the month of Ramadan in the year 610, when the angel Gabriel visited him on Mount Hira, near Mecca. Most Muslims view chapter (or sura) 96 in the Qur’an as the first revelation given to Muhammad.

After a pause (*fatra*) of three years, Muhammad carried Allah’s message to his fellow Meccans. Initially ignored, his denunciation of polytheism and idolatry earned the wrath of various tribal leaders, including those of his own tribe, the Quraysh.

Muslims believe that in 620, Gabriel brought the Prophet to Jerusalem on the back of a heavenly horse named Buraq. Sura 17:1 states: “Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest



The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. (iStockPhoto)

Mosque, whose precincts We did bless.” Muhammad was offered a drink of wine or milk; he chose milk, for which he was commended by Gabriel. After conversing with Jesus and other prophets, he ascended via a ladder (*miraj*) to the seventh heaven. Muslims claim that the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, is built on the spot from where Muhammad ascended and descended. It is from this incident that Muslims believe that they have a stake in Jerusalem, and they consider the Temple Mount the third-most holy spot in Islam.

Two years later, in 622, Muhammad and many of his followers fled to Medina, about 250 miles north of Mecca. This event, the Hijra (or Hijire), marks the starting date of the Muslim calendar. For eight bitter years, the Prophet battled his Meccan enemies, but in January 630, his army took control of Mecca and demolished the idols in and around the Kaaba, the main worship site. This site, traced by Muslims back to Abraham, is the most holy site in Islam, and is now surrounded by the Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām mosque, the largest in the world.

Even after taking control of Mecca, Muhammad continued to reside in Medina. He died on June 8, 632. His burial place, and the mosque that has grown around it, is the second-most important site for Muslim pilgrims. While the majority of scholars accept much of the traditional account concerning Muhammad, a number have expressed skepticism about the traditional biography of Muhammad. Much of the doubt arises from broad concerns about the historical accuracy of the Hadith literature. Meanwhile, Muslims consider Muhammad as their ideal and are often offended by any who question traditional views of the Prophet.

The Qur'an

In general, Muslims believe that the angel Gabriel dictated the revelations contained in the Qur'an to Muhammad. He then recited the words to his wife, and then to other followers. After Muhammad's death, Muslim scholars assembled the final edition of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an contains 114 suras, or chapters, and more than 6,000 verses. The suras are arranged by size, with the shorter chapters near the end. Islamic tradition states that the shorter chapters came first in Muhammad's life, while the longer chapters were revealed after the prophet conquered Mecca in 630 CE. In other words, the Qur'an should be read in reverse order if one wants a basic sense of unfolding revelation. The titles of the various chapters relate to some word or idea in the chapter, though there is often no unifying theme in the various suras.

The Qur'an is best approached through its major themes, which reappear throughout the text.

Allah

The word Allah appears more than 2,500 times in the Qur'an. As in Judaism and Christianity, God is described as eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and is a spirit being. The Qur'an also stresses God's sovereignty and the notion of predestination. The Qur'an puts more focus on the justice of God than his love, and seeks to understand Allah's love (and mercy) through the lens of his holiness. His mercy, a major theme, is related to the willingness of people to turn from evil, though even that repentance is ultimately an outgrowth of God's sovereign will.

Muhammad

The Prophet is the key human person in the holy text. He is the recipient of the revelation and the subject of many passages. When Muhammad is quoted in the text, Muslims contend that these words represent the words of Allah.

Muhammad is considered "the Seal of the Prophets" (sura 33), that is, the last and greatest prophet. Muhammad is a judge to his followers (4:65), and is worthy of respect (2:104; 4:46). His message is universal (34:28), and he is the sign of Allah's mercy to the world (9:61; 28:46–47; 76:24–26). The Prophet is described as prayerful (74:3), gentle (3:159), concerned about his disciples (9:128), and eager for unbelievers to repent (12:97; 25:30). He had "exalted standard of character" (68:4).

Biblical Material

The Qur'an gives significant attention to figures and stories drawn from the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. Jews and Christians are referred to as "the people of the book" (3:64; 29:46). Muslims believe that Allah revealed

himself to Jews and Christians, though both groups altered their scriptures. Muslims use this to explain why both Jewish and Christian accounts often differ from the way they are reported in the Qur'an. Among the biblical figures, Moses gets the most mention, followed by Noah, Abraham, Joshua, David, Jesus, and Mary.

The Qur'an holds Jesus in the highest regard. He is called a Sign from God. His miracles are noted, and the claim that he was born of the Virgin Mary is accepted. The followers of Jesus were called Muslims, according to the Qur'an. Jesus can be called apostle and messenger of God, though he is not the Son of God. He is a prophet, which is the highest title one can be given under Islam's strict monotheism.

True Believers

Much of the Qur'an is devoted to description of the life of those who submit to Allah. The word "Muslim" actually has the meaning of submission behind it. Though Islam is a religion of law, the Qur'an is more preoccupied with larger principles than legal niceties. The Muslim follows Allah and trusts his will as absolute. Hence, Muslims often repeat the word *inshallah*, which is Arabic for "if God wills." The devout Muslim abandons all false gods, since Allah alone is "lord of the east and the west" (73:9). Following Allah means, of course, following Prophet Muhammad, as noted earlier.

The Qur'an mandates prayer (2:238, 70:9, and 87:15, for example) and also fasting (2:185). The true believer should be forgiving, peaceful, and faithful. Charity is commanded, and good works are a sign of true faith (3:114). Allah's disciple obeys divine instructions on marriage (4:23; 5:5) and on inheritance laws (4:11, 126).

The true Muslim avoids evil in all its forms. This means no gambling, drinking, usury, and unlawful food (*haram*). Skeptics are to be avoided. Sura 44:9 warns against those "who play about in doubt." Muslims males may have multiple wives, but cannot have more than four (3:3). Sexual lust is condemned and modesty valued. Western critics often complain that an overemphasis on modesty leads to the suppression of women.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The focus of Sunni Islam, submission to God, finds expression in five practices, popularly known as the five pillars. For Shi'a Muslims, a minority group, there is a slightly different expression of basics. For Sunni believers, the first pillar is the well-known profession of faith known as the *shahadah*: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger." These words seek to establish the supremacy of Allah as the one true God and the finality of Muhammad as Allah's ultimate prophet.

Second, faithful Muslims obey the call to prayer (*salat*), which is to happen five specific times every day. Muhammad first advised his followers to pray facing

toward Jerusalem, but soon reoriented his followers toward Mecca. Sunni Muslims generally gather at the mosque on Fridays for prayer.

Third, Muslims are supposed to give a percentage of their worth to the poor and needy. The tithe, or *zakat*, is collected by a few Muslim states, but most Muslims give through leaving money in the metal *zakat* box in their local mosque. The *zakat* involves giving 2.5 percent of the Muslim's assets, but it is not charity since it is an obligatory act, one that is usually to be done in private.

Fourth, unless prevented by health concerns, all Muslims are to fast—that is, to abstain from all food, water, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset during the entire month of Ramadan. The fast offers a time for spiritual reflection, repentance, and giving to the poor. The whole Qur'an is often recited in evening worship over the 30-day period. Ramadan ends with a celebratory feast day known as *Id al-Fitr*.

The last pillar is known as the *hajj* and concerns the duty of all able-bodied Muslims to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Only Muslims are allowed inside Mecca. Many Muslims regard their experience of the *hajj* to be the greatest spiritual moment of their lives.

Jihad

The idea of *jihad* (literally, struggle) has emerged in the contemporary world as one of the most critical and controversial of Islamic beliefs. Although many Muslims and some scholars contend that the word simply means spiritual struggle, *jihad* has often been interpreted in a more literal fashion as Holy War. The roots of these contemporary conflicts about Islam's real identity lie in ancient debates about the teaching of the Qur'an, the example of the Prophet, the legitimacy of non-Muslim governments, and the place of war in Islamic ideology.

The Branches of Islam

Like all religions, Islam has not maintained its original unity. Within a generation of the Prophet's death, Muslims were at war with each other over political leadership and the proper interpretation of Islamic spirituality. Generally, Muslims can be grouped under three major branches: Sunni Islam; Shi'a Islam, also known as Shiite; and Sufism.

Sunni Islam represents the largest grouping in Islam, claiming about 90 percent of all Muslims in some estimates. This figure may be high as Sufism appears to be under-reported in many parts of the Muslim world.

Sunni Muslims trace themselves back to the prophet but separate from Shi'a Muslims over the question of proper authority in Islam. Differences here relate to competing claims about connection to Muhammad, the text of the Hadith, the shape of Islamic law, and the nature of salvation. Sunni Muslims have themselves disagreed over the methodology of interpreting Muslim law and have divided into four main schools of jurisprudence: Hanafite, Malikite, Shafiite, and Hanbalite.

There are about 170 million Shi'a Muslims globally. In spite of minority status, the Shi'a version of Islam received enormous attention because of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. The shah of Iran was deposed, and the Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–1989), the well-known Shiite Muslim leader, returned from exile in France to run the country. The Iranian view of the West was and is shaped powerfully by anger over British and American plots to foment a coup in Iran in 1953–1954.

In Sunni Islam, the imam is the person who leads prayer in the mosque. In Shi'a Islam, the word “imam” is used most significantly of major leaders chosen by Allah to guide Shi'a Islam in its earliest and most important years. One Shi'a group believes there were 12 such leaders, while the Ismaili Muslims argue that there were only 7. The Zaydiyya Shi'a, a minority group in Yemen, contends there were five imams.

The Sufis are famous as the mystics of Islam. Some scholars estimate their numbers at 240 million throughout the world. Sufism emerged when Islam became legalistic and materialistic in the twilight years of the earliest Muslim dynasties. Since most Sufis align themselves with Sunni Islam, some experts on Islam refuse to label Sufism as a third grouping within Islam. Regardless, the fact that Sufis often experience persecution from both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, plus distinctive Sufi practices, make it mandatory to note Sufism as a distinctive part of the Islamic story.

The Progress of the Faith

Muhammad's expansionist vision gripped Islam in the earliest years following the death of the Prophet. The rapid spread of Islam is probably the most striking thing about the first century of Islamic life. Muslims conquered Damascus by 636, ruled Jerusalem by 638, and controlled Syria by 640. Egypt came under Islamic control by 646, and the Sassanid dynasty in Persia fell by 651. Muslims moved into Spain in the early eighth century, and King Roderick of Spain was defeated in 711. Though Charles Martel stopped the Muslim advance in southern France in 732, the extent of the Islamic empire by then is startling.

Divisions within Islam are reflected to some degree in the changing Islamic dynasties. Albert Hourani documents more than 30 dynasties, like the Aglabids



This 19th-century etching by Gustave Doré depicts Saladin, a Muslim warrior and sultan of the 12th century. Saladin took Jerusalem back from the Christians in 1187. (John Clark Ridpath, *Ridpath's History of the World*, 1901)

in eastern Algeria (800–909), the Buyids in Iran/Iraq (932–1062), and the Almo-hads in the Maghreb (1130–1269). Longer-standing dynasties included the Abbassids, who ruled the Middle East and North Africa from 749 through 1258, and the Ottomans, who dominated the Muslim world from 1281 until 1922.

Muslims in the Middle East suffered some setbacks as a result of the First Crusade. Their misfortunes were temporarily reversed under Saladin (1138–1193), who had served as a minister to the Islamic Fatimid rulers in Egypt. Saladin took control of Egypt in 1171 and went on to retake Jerusalem from the Christians in 1187, just five years before his death. A century later, the Ottoman Empire under Osman I (1258–1321) began to make its presence felt. The empire, growing in strength, hit a new plateau in 1453 when Mehmed II conquered Constantinople. Suleiman I (1494–1566), the great Ottoman leader, ruled as far north as Budapest, as far west as Morocco, east to Iraq, and south to Yemen. His naval commander Khair ad-Din (a.k.a. Barbarossa) exerted hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean for decades. By this time, Muslim power was exerting control from Morocco to Indonesia. Indonesia, now the most populous Muslim country, was under Islamic influence by the 16th century. Shah Jahan (d. 1666) started construction of the Taj Mahal in Agra (India) in 1632, and Morocco came under Alawi control in 1668.

Beginning in the 17th century, Islamic kingdoms would begin to experience a series of setbacks. Losses in Eastern Europe, beginning with the failure to take Vienna in 1683, would see the Ottomans being pushed out of Europe step by step and lead eventually to the fall of the empire after World War I. In the 19th century, Great Britain challenged Muslim control of Muslims in India, while secular Marxist forces would challenge it throughout Central and South Asia. While losing control of the government in many places, it has maintained the allegiance of the people in the face of competition from an expansive Christianity and modern secular philosophies, most notably Marxism.

Contemporary Islam has been greatly affected by a number of revival and revitalization movements, beginning with the career of Muhammad al-Wahhab (1703–1792), the ideological founder of the Wahhabi movement, which eventually gained control in the heartland of Islam. Al-Wahhab also influenced a new generation of Islamic reformers, most notably Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1838–1897) and his student Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905). In the 20th century, anticolonial, pro-Islamic movements dominated the Muslim story. They resisted Western influence, protesting against secularized Arab governments seen as un-Islamic and corrupt.

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded by the youthful Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), was formed in 1928 and spread to India through Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi (1903–1979), who founded the parallel Jamaat-e-Islam movement. After al-Banna was assassinated in 1949, Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) continued al-Banna’s cause. The establishment of the state of Israel and the Palestinian question also fueled the growth of Islamic militancy. Islamic militant groups, most with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, have called for an armed jihad against Israel. American support for Israel was also an issue cited by Al Qaeda as part of its

rationale for its terrorist actions against the United States, most notably the 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center.

The revivalist trends of the last two centuries, expressed in moderate and extreme Islamist movements, have created a dilemma for the Islamic world. On the one hand, the success of Islamism has led to a new pride about the faith proclaimed by Muhammad. Nevertheless, the fundamentalist impulse has created renewed conflict among Muslims, expressed in divisions over Islamist groups, including the Taliban in Afghanistan. As well, there are bitter internal disputes about the role of women, human rights, and the proper scope of Islamic law in both the Islamic world and the West.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir’ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara’ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days

When as a young man, the Prophet Muhammad began to initially share his new revelation with his fellow residents of Mecca, Arabia, he received a cold and hostile reaction. In the midst of their rejection, his wife Khadijah died (619 CE). The situation began to turn around only in 620, when he had a significant spiritual experience. The angel Gabriel who had facilitated his reception of the Qur'an, accompanied him on a mystical journey. One evening, he and Muhammad mounted the winged heavenly horse Buraq and traveled to Jerusalem. As Sura 17 states:

Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship [Mecca] to the Far distant place of worship [Jerusalem] the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer. (Pickthal translation)

Once in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount, Muhammad ascended to heaven. Muslims believe that the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine constructed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, rests over the spot from where Muhammad ascended. Once in the heavenly realms, he was offered the choice of a drink, either of wine or milk, and Gabriel commended him for choosing the latter. He then conversed with those men who formed the lineage of previous prophets sent by God, including Jesus, and then further ascended via a ladder (*miraj*) to the seventh heaven. There he received a number of additional revelations directly from Allah, before descending and returning home.

Two years later, in 622 CE, which would become year one of the Muslim calendar, Muhammad and many of his followers moved to Medina, some 250 miles north of Mecca. There, they would organize the original Muslim community and

begin their effort to return to Mecca. The move from Mecca, called the Higrā, and to be precise, Muhammad's arrival in Medina (what the Common Era calendar knows as July 16, 622), became the point from which Muslims would start their new calendar.

The new calendar is a simple lunar calendar with 12 lunar months and approximately 354 days in the year. An Islamic year is thus approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, and each new year begins approximately 11 days earlier on the Common Era calendar. The Qur'an offered comment on the new calendar:

Lo! [T]he number of the months with Allah is twelve months by Allah's ordinance in the day that He created the heavens and the earth. Four of them are sacred: that is the right religion. So wrong not yourselves in them. And wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that Allah is with those who keep their duty (unto Him).

Postponement (of a sacred month) is only an excess of disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled; they allow it one year and forbid it (another) year, that they may make up the number of the months which Allah hath hallowed, so that they allow that which Allah hath forbidden. The evil of their deeds is made fair-seeming unto them. Allah guideth not the disbelieving folk. (9: 36–37, Pickthal translation)

Following Allah's prohibition, Muslims refuse to use an intercalary month (or any other method) to reconcile the lunar cycles with a solar year. Islam spread initially, and still has its strength, in the Middle East and across North Africa in areas close to the equator. These lands are less bound to an annual agricultural cycle and to the necessities of knowing when the primary growing season begins and ends each year.

The Muslim calendar includes a seven-day week, and the day (Friday in the Western calendar) named *el Jumah*, is the day of gathering. As in Jewish practice, the new day begins at sunset, as the light of the former day fades away; Muhammad entered Medina at that time. The week begins at sunset on *el Jumah* (the end of the light on Thursday on the Common Era calendar), and at noon on Friday, Muslims gather at the mosque for weekly communal prayer.

The lunar month is deemed to be 29 and one-half days, and the 12 Islamic months alternate between 29 and 30 days. To account for the deviation of the moon's cycle from 29 and one-half days, an extra day is added eight times every 30 years. The Islamic month starts from the sunset after a crescent moon was sighted on either the 29th or 30th day of the present month. The crescent moon's visibility was easy in dry climates, but as Islam spread, it could cause complications in places where the sky might be cloudy for several days at the end of the month.

The 12 Islamic lunar months, which go from new moon to new moon, are:

1. Muharram
2. Safar

- 3. Rabi I
- 4. Rabi II
- 5. Jumada I
- 6. Jumada II
- 7. Rajab
- 8. Sha’ban
- 9. Ramadan
- 10. Shawwal
- 11. Dhu al-Qi’dah
- 12. Dhu al-Hijjah

The beginning of the Muslim year with the month of Muharram followed the suggestion of the Uthman ibn Affan (c. 579–656), one of the four rightly guided caliphs who led the early Muslim community. This suggestion proved functional as a beginning point. Many believers in Arabia would have just completed their annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and would be ready to make a new beginning. The month of Ramadan is venerated among Muslims as the month of the fast (the keeping of which is one of the five pillars of the faith). During that month, the faithful are required to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sex through the daylight hours.

Important dates in the Islamic calendar include:

Muharram 1	Islamic New Year, not an especially holy day in Islam.
Muharram 10	Ashura, Moses leads the people through the Red Sea.
Rabi I 12	Mawlid an Nabi, the birthday of Muhammad.
Rajab 27	Laylat al-Mir’aj, or the Night of the Journey and Ascension.
Sha’ban 15	Laylat ul Bara’ah or the Night of Freedom from Fire.
Ramadan 1	The fast of Ramadan begins.
Ramadan 27	Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power, the revealing of the Qur’an begins.
Shawwal 1–3	Id al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, a time of feasting for three days.
Dhu al-Hijjah 8–10	The Hajj, or annual pilgrimage to Mecca.
Dhu al-Hijjah 10–13	Id al-Adha, or Festival of Sacrifice,

In addition to the holidays celebrated by all Muslims, there are important additional dates recognized by Shi’a Muslims include:

Muharram 10	Ashura, martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali and his followers.
Rajab 13	Birthday of Ali ibn Abi Talib.
Rabi I 17	Mawlid an Nabi, or Muhammad’s birthday for Shi’a Muslims.
Ramadan 21	Ali ibn Abi Talib’s Martyrdom.
Dhu al-Hijjah 18	Feast of Ghadir Khumm, when Muhammad appointed Ali ibn Abi Tabib to lead the Muslim community.

Because of the way that the beginning of the month and year were calculated, the day for celebrating holidays would often vary a day or two from country to country. This issue was not as important in centuries past, except for the day of the Hajj, which began on the date on the Saudi Arabian calendar. Through the centuries, Middle Eastern countries customarily looked to Cairo to set the beginning of the month. In the 20th century, with the movement of Islam around the world and the simultaneous improvement in communications, the desire and demand for a uniform calendar increased markedly. Waiting each month for the sighting of the new moon's crescent placed severe limits on long-term planning by both governments and the business community. Heated debates have occurred concerning the use of astronomical calculations to preset Muslim calendars. While a majority of Muslim clerics appear to oppose replacing actual observation with such modern calculations, a growing minority has now adopted them. This adoption is most noticeable in countries where Muslims are a distinct minority.

In 2006, American Muslim leaders, for example, attended a conference organized by the Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA) and decided in favor of using astronomical calculation to determine the beginning of the Islamic lunar months. Further, they suggested the utilization of either the International Date Line (IDL) or Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) as a point of reference.

The FCNA was responding to a post–World War II concern over a perceived fragmentation of Muslim communities over the determination of the first day of Ramadan, Id al-Fitr, and Id al-Adha. In spite of the arguments of Muslim scientists, the moon-sighting tradition predominated. The FCNA ruling provoked a strong response, but while the American Muslim community continues in a divided state over this issue, FCNA's support has steadily grown. Given the state of astronomy (and its connections to astrology), when Islam was formed, moon sighting was a more reliable method for deciding the beginning of the month. That situation has changed considerably, and modern science and the need for precision now command the field. Muslim scholars now argue that while Islam requires that certain religious duties, most notably fasting during Ramadan and performing the Hajj, be done according to the Islamic lunar calendar, Islam does not understand the act of deciding when the Islamic month begins to be a religious act in itself. They argue that the movement of the moon belongs to the natural order; hence, the determination of lunar phases is best handled by science. This disagreement is destined to continue for the foreseeable future.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Iwashimizu Matsuri (September 15)

The Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine is a Shinto shrine in the city of Yawata in Kyoto Prefecture. It dates from the ninth century when Emperor Seiwa (850–880) oversaw its construction after listening to an oracle voiced by a Buddhist monk named Gyokyo, in which the deity Hachiman expressed his wish to be near to Kyoto so he could protect both the city and the Imperial House of Japan. In a vision, the same monk selected the specific site. Hachiman, the ancient Shinto god of war and divine protector of Japan, was integrated into Buddhism soon after its arrival in Japan in the seventh century and identification with the royal family.

The Iwashimizu Matsuri was first held in 863. It came to include a ceremony at the bank of the Hôjô River at the foot of Mount Otoko-yama, on which the shrine rests. The rituals featured the release of fishes into the river and prayers for the peace of the souls of all sentient beings. Most importantly, it was a festival that for centuries united Buddhists and Shintoists in a single celebration.

Following the Meiji restoration of 1868, the new government, which privileged Shinto over the Buddhism favored by the former Shogunate, issued a variety of decrees that served to drive a wedge between the Buddhist and Shinto communities and led to the destruction of many Buddhist temples in the Mount Otoko-yama area. One very practical effect of the decrees was the forbidding of Buddhists to officiate at the annual event at the riverside. The Iwashimizu Festival continued as a strictly Shintoist affair.

The most extreme feelings against Buddhism died out after a generation, and by the end of the century, the Buddhist ceremony at the Hôjô River was revived as a element of the larger Iwashimizu festival. That event continued until 1999.

Then in 2004, with anti-Buddhist feeling no longer a factor, a grand festival at the river was held that included the traditional fusion of Buddhism and Shinto. Leadership was provided by the Most Rev. Tanaka Tsunekiyo of the Iwashimizu Shrine and Archbishop of Enryaku-ji, the revered Tendai Buddhist monastery on

Mount Hiei outside Kyoto. This initiated a new era of celebrating the Iwashimizu Festival.

Among the additional Shinto practices during the festival is a purification ceremony built around small paper dolls that believers will rub over their bodies and blow upon, an action that symbolically transfers any illness or impurity from them to the doll. They write their name and age on the doll and return it to the shrine. Subsequently, the priests at the Hachiman Shrine will bind the dolls together, place them in small boats, and place them in the river where they will carry the negativities transferred to them far away.

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See also Aki Matsuri; Doll Festival; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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■ Jainism

Jainism is generally seen as a reaction to the leadership of the Hindu community by the elite Brahman caste in the sixth century BCE. The name, Jain, derives from *jina* (victory), a reference to their founder Mahavira, who was called the Victor. Jains are disciples of the Victor.

Many Jains reject the contemporary scholarship on their religion's origins and point instead to a lineage of 24 saints, the Tirthankaras, which include one female, Mallinatha. The 22nd in the lineage, Nemi, is reputed to have lived for a thousand years, just one of the attributions ascribed to the saints that have caused many to see them as mythological rather than historical beings. History begins with Parsva (b. c. 872 BCE), the son of the ruler of Benares, India. As a young man, he became a notable soldier and the husband of a princess. However, during his 30th year, he renounced his royal life and became an ascetic. He wandered India, and as disciples came to him, he laid out a life based on four vows—do not take life, do not lie, do not steal, and do not own property. He died in Bengal, and the place of his death, Mount Sammeda, remains a site of pilgrimage and reverence to the Jain community.

Parsva was succeeded by Vardhamana (b. c. 599–c. 527 BCE), later known as Mahavira, a member of the warrior caste. During most his life as a Jain, he lived without clothes, seen as a visible sign of his renunciation of worldly possessions. Spending some 12 years as an ascetic, he is said to have become the Victor over his worldly passions. The state of realization he attained is known as *keval-jnana*, considered to be perfect perception, knowledge, power, and bliss. He spent the next 30 years traveling on bare feet around India preaching to the people the eternal truth he had realized. He attracted people from all walks of life, both rich and poor, from royalty to untouchables. During his time, the largely monastic community assembled by Parsva was increased by the development of a lay community. Mahavira organized his followers into a fourfold order of monks (*sadhu*), nuns (*sadhvi*), laymen (*shravak*), and laywomen (*shravika*).

He also added a fifth vow—poverty—to the original four vows for the monks and nuns. These would form the basis of the main values of Jain life today: nonviolence (*ahimsa*), or the refusal to cause harm to any living things; truthfulness (*satya*), or the speaking only of harmless truth; non-stealing (*asteya*), that is, not to take anything not properly given; chastity (*brahmacharya*), or refusal to indulge in sensual pleasures; and nonpossession (*aparigraha*), or detachment from people,



A Jain ceremony takes place at a Ranakpur temple in India. (Rene Drouyer/Dreamstime.com)

places, and material things. Lay people were to value the vows but lead a somewhat less austere existence.

Jain teachings remained as oral teachings for several centuries following Mahavira's death. They were finally given written form around 300 BCE, and these texts exist today as the Jain sacred writings.

The Jain community experienced growth for its first decade. Around 300 BCE, it split into two basic communities—the Svetambaras (who wore white clothes) and the Digambaras (air-clothed or unclothed)—and over the centuries, each divided into a number of subsects. The community reached its peak in the 12th century when the ruler of Gujarat was converted to Jainism by Hemecandra (1088–1172) and turned Gujarat into a Jain state. In the next century, however, the Muslim conquest of India began, and further growth was largely blunted. Periodically, both Hindus and Muslims turned on the Jains.

Jain Beliefs

The Jain teachings picture a three-story universe, the middle level being the realm of human existence. The goal of human life is to allow the soul to reach nirvana or the state of *moska* (liberation), pictured spatially as the top of the universe, where it can remain in a state of eternal bliss and peace. Commonly at the end of life, one goes to the lower realm, a dark place where they are punished for various misdeeds. There is also a heavenly realm of the gods and saints, but it is not one's goal.

The earthly realm is the realm of human action. The human soul is seen as consisting of a set of *jivas*, or immaterial monads. These monads are intermixed with

karma (consequences of one actions), which are pictured as particles. Karmic matter (*ajiva*) gives color to the monads. Colors (*leysas*) range from the worst black to blue, gray, red, yellow, rose, and white. Each color is associated with characteristics. A black color to one's jivas is indicative of cruelty, while a person of a dispassionate and impartial nature is seen as having yellow as their predominant color. All actions produce karma, even good ones; thus the ideal is nonaction and detachment.

The Jain understanding of the goal of life has ensured that ethics is of primary importance in the individual's life. The person ready to become a full member of the community must first profess faith in the teachings of the Jain saints and then renounce all attachments to other religions. That having been done, they are ready to take the 12 vows. They vow (1) not intentionally to take life, especially of a jiva (*ahimsa*); (2) not to lie or exaggerate (*satya*); (3) not to steal (*achaurya*); (4) refrain from marital unfaithfulness and unchaste thoughts (*bhramacharya*); (5) limit accumulation of possessions and give away extras (*aparigraha*); (6) consciously limit oneself so as to decrease the possibility of committing transgressions (*dik*); (7) limit the number of both consumable and nonconsumable items in one's possession (*bhoga-upbhoga*); (8) avoid unnecessary evil (*anartha-danda*); (9) observe periods of meditation (*samayik*); (10) observe periods of self-imposed limitations (*desavaka-sika*); (11) to live for a period as an ascetic or monk (*pausadha*); and (12) support the monastic community (*atithi samvibhaga*).

The Jain vows carry some general implications for living one's life. Jains are vegetarians and do not even consume eggs. They refrain from any occupations that involve the destruction of living creatures; even farming, which may harm living creatures in the process of plowing and planting, is avoided. Business and scholarship are more acceptable. The monastic life is most preferred.

Monks, recognized by their shaved heads, are organized into communities each headed by an *acarya*, or superior, who possesses the authority for structuring the community and overseeing instruction. Monks and nuns tend to itinerate around the countryside. However, during the rainy season, they will congregate for periods of concentrated study, practicing austerities, and meditation. Part of the rationale for staying inside at this time is protection of the many life forms brought out by the wet weather.

Following the Jain path ideally leads to heightened levels of self-realization. The five steps along the path to liberation are recognized as right perceptions (*mati*); clear scriptural knowledge (*sruta*); supernatural knowledge (*avadhi*); clear knowledge of the thought of others (*manahparyaya*); and omniscience (*kevala*). Those who attain kevala are also identified as perfected ones (*siddhas*). Jains accept the idea of reincarnation and believe that the upward path may take many lifetimes. In the end, the fully realized soul will fly to the top of the universe and therein reside in a karma-free condition.

To assist the process of life, the Jain life, and attaining heightened levels of realization, the Jain community has built numerous temples, which are identified with the Jain symbol, a swastika above which are three dots and a half moon. The swastika is an ancient symbol in Asia and has no relation to its modern

adoption in the 1930s by the German Nazis. Temples may be the abode of statues of the saints, and veneration of the saints easily transforms into worship. In Digambara temples, the figures are depicted as nudes, standing with their eyes cast downward. In the Svetambara temples, the figures tend to be seated with their legs crossed. Both types of temples follow a cycle of ceremonies and rites.

Divisions within the Jain Community

The major division in the Jain community between the clothed and unclothed monks may go back even to the time of Mahavira and his living for so many years in a naked state. However, the formalization of the division became intertwined with a second problem—the writing down of the Jain scriptures. As generations came and went, Jain leaders pondered the problem created by having to memorize and pass on the scriptures and came to realize that material was continually being lost. Thus, around 300 BCE, they began the process of writing down and compiling what was remembered.

The decision to write down the scriptures was, in part, occasioned by events growing out of a great famine that spread through northern India. During this time, an important chief leader named Bhadrabahu led a segment of the community to the south. While there, in the hills of Shravana Belgola, Bhadrabahu committed ritual suicide by starvation, a practice that was quite acceptable among the Jains for one already approaching the end of their life. After the famine ended, the group returned to the north only to discover that the monks had abandoned their life without clothes. They also realized that they had lost a segment of the Jain scripture, which Bhadrabahu had failed to teach to his successor.

Over the next centuries, the division of the community around those monks who wore clothes and those who did not formally resulted in the separation of the Digambaras from the Svetambaras.

The Digambaras teach that nudity was integral to the teachings of Mahavira, and that it is completely in line with the observation argument that a monk should be devoid of any possessions (such as clothes) and devoid of the desire to protect his body from the elements. They depict Mahavira in complete nudity, without any ornamentation, with downcast eyes. They also teach that Mahavira never married and was celibate throughout his earthly existence.

Regarding the scriptures, the Digambaras teach that the words of Mahavira, reputedly contained in the 11 *angas* of the Jain canon, were lost forever during the famine as Bhadrabahu did not pass them on. Hence, they refuse to accept the 11 *angas* of the Jain canon as owned by the Svetambaras and now form part of the 41 *Sutras*.

Finally, the Digambaras hold that women cannot join the order of those in the renounced life as they were not qualified for the austere life the order demanded from each of the adherents. Today the Digambaras are found mostly in the southern part of India, especially in Mysore state, where the group led by Bhadrabahu had journeyed some 2,000 years ago. The modern Indian state has moved to limit the public nudity of the Digambara monks.

In contrast, the Svetambaras teach that some of the *Tirthankaras* (those of the lineage of saints) did not live life in the nude. Most importantly, Parsva, the saint immediately prior to Mahavira, wore white robes. They note that prior to his becoming an ascetic, Mahavira had lived a householder's life, that he had married and fathered a daughter, and that he did not become an ascetic until his parents had died and he had fulfilled his necessary family duties. They also make note of an incident in his life. He began his renounced life as a clothed monk until one day, the white robe he wore was caught in a thorny bush, and as he moved on the robe was pulled off. Never holding on to worldly things, Mahavira simply left it and continued on his way naked. Thus, they argue, Mahavira's nudity was not consciously adopted, but was an accident of the moment.

Regarding the scriptures, the Svetambaras believe that the words of Mahavira were not lost during the great famine and accept the authority of the 11 *angas* of the Jain canon. They also believe that women can attain sainthood, calling to their cause the case of the 19th Tirthankara Malli, who was a female. Today, the Svetambaras are located primarily in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

In modern times, both the Digambaras and the Svetambaras have divided into a number of subsects that go under such names as Sthanakavasi, Terapanthi, Beespanthi, Japneeya, and Murti-pujak. Typically, a distinguishable subgroup within the Jain community consists of a group of monks, the temples and monasteries they operate, and the laypeople who support them.

The Sthanakavasi Jain tradition, for example, can be traced to the Gujarati Jain reformer Lumpaka (ca. 1415–1489), who protested the lax practice of the Murtipujak Svetambara monks. Lumpaka worked as a scribe copying manuscripts for Jain monks. In his work, he discovered that Jain scriptures do not mention any practice of giving money (for temple construction, for example) as a means to merit, the performance of worship before images, or rituals involving acts of violence such as the breaking of flowers. He rejected image-worship as well as the authority of several texts within the canonical texts that contain references to such worship. He began to live as an ascetic, following the oldest textual prescriptions. Lumpaka gained a following in Gujarat, which was continued by his first disciple, Bhana, who seems to have initiated some 45 followers during the 1470s.

Early in the 16th century, the Sthanakavasi split into several groups, which by mid-century had become some 13 independent branches, which further divided into additional distinct subgroups. However, by the 20th century, only four branches remained in existence.

The Terapanth Svetambara Jain tradition was founded by Acarya Bhiksu (1726–1803), who had become attached to an acarya of the subsects of the Sthanakavasi tradition in the 1750s. Then, in 1760, complaining of the laxity of the Sthanakavasis, he founded his own order at Kelva near Rajsamand. In its early years, the new order attracted only 13 male members (including Bhiksu), and his critics labeled his group the path of the 13, or *terah panth*. Bhiksu turned the label to his favor by slightly changing it to *tera panth*, or your path.

Underlying the original break was a disagreement over the understanding of the Jain teaching on karma. Jains believe that the soul must renounce all violence (and ultimately all action) to achieve liberation from karma. The Sthanakavasis also emphasize the role of compassion as a religious virtue and suggest that, for example, charitable actions have a positive karmic result. In contrast, Bhiksu assumed a more narrow interpretation based upon the understanding that bad karma and good karma equally obstructed the process of liberation, and hence both must be avoided. Thus, he reasoned, acts of compassion were sinful.

Contemporary Jain Communities

Today, in India, the followers of Jainism engage primarily in business and trade. The committed are known for their fasting, nonviolence, vegetarianism, philanthropy, and simple lifestyle. They do not make the sharp break with the Hindu community (as, for example, the Buddhists and Sikhs do), and in turn, the Hindu majority do see them as a sister community.

Through the 20th century, Jain communities have been established around the world. Among the earliest appearances of Jains outside of India, one occurred in 1893 when Virchand Gandhi (1864–1901) made a presentation at the 1893 Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago. His travel to Chicago was opposed by many of his colleagues, who believed that travel by any means other than on foot was immoral. He would be followed by a few others, such as Champat Rai Jain, who traveled to England in the 1930s, but no communities emerged until after World War II. Migration to England began in the 1950s, and by the 1990s, there were some 30,000 in the United Kingdom, most from Gujarat, and they have been organized into the Federation of Jain Organisations.

Significant migration to North America began in the 1970s, and centers have been opened in most states in the eastern half of the United States as well as Texas and California. These now cooperate (along with Canada centers) in the Federation of Jain Associations in North America. Several Jain teachers have also come to the United States and founded organizations that reach out to the larger non-Indian population: the International Nahavir Jain Mission and the Jain Meditation International Center.

Jain centers and temples may also now be found in Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan.

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See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Jainism—Cycle of Holidays; Kartika Purnima; Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Jainism—Cycle of Holidays

Jains trace their history of a lineage of saints, the Tirthankaras, who operated through the centuries prior to the generally acknowledged founder Mahavira, who lived in the sixth century BCE. Jains also see their religion as a separate faith relative to Hinduism, in the same manner as Buddhism is a separate faith, though many consider Jainism as little more than a Hindu variant. There is truth in both views, and those truths are on display in the cycle of holidays found in the Jain community. The holidays acknowledge the Tirthankaras, but the major days focus largely on Mahavira. The Hindu deities have been largely abandoned, but the Hindu lunar calendar, with its focus on the full (purnima) and new moons, is utilized and Jain holidays occur even as the major Hindu festivals are being celebrated. That being said, Jains celebrate a distinctive set of holidays and follow their own unique holiday cycle.

The major holidays for Jains include:

New Year's Day. While the Hindu calendar now begins with the spring equinox and the month of Chaitra, many Hindus consider the five-day Diwali festival in the fall as the real time to celebrate the New Year. Jains agree. In the middle of the Hindu festival, Jains celebrate Diwali on the last day of the month of Ashvina as the last day of their year, and begin the month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar) as the first day of the new year. It is a day to gather at the local temple and perform a puja in praise of the 24 Tirthankaras.

Gyana Panchami (also known as Knowledge Day) occurs on the fifth day of the month of Kartika. Jains will gather at their temples to hear readings from the Jain scriptures and to worship them for the knowledge they brought to the people.

Kartika Purnima (or Kartak Purnima) is celebrated on the full moon (purnima) of the month of Kartika (October–November). Kartika is the month after the end of the monsoon season, and traditionally, travel was much easier. Thus, the days around the full moon became the time to go on pilgrimages to the many sacred sites of Jainism.

Maun Ekadash, or Mauna Agyaras, is observed on the 11th day in the month of Magrashirsha (November–December on the Common Era calendar). This is a day for fasting and meditation in an environment of complete silence. Meditation is directed toward honoring the five beings that lead the Jain community—three embodied, namely the archarya, the upadhyaya, and the sadhu; and the two no longer in their body, the arhant or arihant, and the siddha.

The **Paush Dashami** festival, the anniversary of the birth of Shri Parshwanath, the 23rd Tirthankaras, and the one immediately preceding Mahavira, is observed for three days during the Indian month of Margashirsha (November–December on the Common Era calendar).

Navpad Oli is a nine-day observance held twice annually in the spring and fall, the former during the waxing moon of the Indian month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar) and then during the waxing moon of Ashwina (September–October). The nine days culminate on the purnima, or full moon of the month. The fasting and meditation for the nine days relate to the nine pillars or posts of the Jain community, including the five positions that those who begin the renounced life attain—saddhu, upadhyaya, acharya (those who provide clerical leadership for the Jain community), and in a disembodied next life, the siddha and arihant. The other four targets of meditation are the four basic virtues that Jains seek to cultivate—right view, right knowledge, right conduct, and austerity in abstaining from lusts and desires.

Mahavir Jayanti, the birthday celebration for Jainism's founder, occurs on the 13th day of the waxing moon of the month of Chaitra. That throws it in the midst of the spring observance of Navpad Oli. However, remembering the birth of Mahavira is about identifying with the lifestyle he perpetuated, it is thus entirely appropriate to celebrate his life during a time of fasting. Celebrations may include pujas at the temple and processions.

Akshay Tritiya, also known as Akha Teej, is observed by Vaishnava Hindus as the appearance day of Lord Parashuram (the sixth incarnation of the deity Vishnu) on the third day of the waxing moon in the Indian month of Vaishakh. Akshay Tritiya is also observed as a holy day by Jains, among whom are people who begin and end a yearlong period of meditation that includes an alternative day fasting disciple.

Paryushana, one of the more important Jain holidays, is an eight-day observance marked by fasting and study of the Kalpa Sutra, an important part of the Jain scripture, which is read aloud and expounded upon by Jain monks. The day has received some notice from the interfaith community because of its inclusion of a time for people to forgive each other for any faults committed over the past year.

Diwali, the festival of lights, is possibly the most celebrated holiday in India, beginning in the waning moon of the month of Ashvina (October–November on the Common Era calendar) and ending five days later in the first days of the waxing moon of the month of Kartika. For Jains, evening of the last day of Ashvina is celebrated as Diwali. Its importance to them is that on Diwali in 537 BCE, the founder of Jainism, Mahavira, achieved Nirvana of miksha (salvation). This evening should be spent in meditation. Some will chant the Uttarahyayan Sutra, one of the holy books believed to contain the last teachings delivered by Mahavira before his demise.

The day after Diwali, the Jain community begins the new month with its celebration of New Year's Day.

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See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Jainism; Kartika Purnima; Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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James the Greater, Feast Day of St. (July 25)

James, one of the Twelve Apostles who gathered around Jesus during his earthly ministry, was a person of great importance to the early church, though little is known of him after the first Pentecost. He and his brother John are noted as the sons of a fisherman, Zebedee, and were among the first disciples Jesus formally called to his side. The brothers along with Peter were present at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–13) and at the First Pentecost (Acts 1–2). According to the Book of Acts (12:1–2), he died a martyr's death during the reign of King Herod Agrippa I (r. 39–44 CE), probably around 42 CE.

Tradition suggests that James may have gone to Spain to evangelize the land, but this tradition is contradicted by Paul's reference in his Epistle to the Romans that he wished to evangelize in as yet unevangelized territory, namely Spain. The more well-known story tells of his body being transported to Spain. After James's death, it seemed that Herod refused to allow his burial, so some Christians stole the body and placed it on a ship. As the ship lacked a crew, it was suggested that angels guided it across the Mediterranean. Eventually, the ship arrived at the mouth of the river Ulla in Galicia (Spain). The group now in possession of the body then encountered another obstacle in the person of the local rulers. Both King Duyo and Queen Lupa were hostile to Christianity, and they buried James secretly on an isolated mountainside.

There the body lay hidden and forgotten by all. Only some eight centuries later did a hermit named Pelayo receive a vision while traveling near the burial site. He heard music and saw a shining light at a place he called "Campus Stellae," or "field of the star," later shortened to Compostela. His experience was eventually reported to the local bishop in the town of Iria Flavia. The bishop's investigation of the occurrence launched an investigation that led to the discovery of the lost site of the apostle's tomb.

The discovery was reported to King Alphonse II (765–842), who celebrated it by declaring the Apostle James the patron of his empire. He saw to the construction of an initial chapel dedicated to Saint James, and subsequently to two others that were dedicated to Jesus Christ and to Saints Peter and Paul. He nurtured the development of a Augustinian monastery. Backed by the belief that the body of the apostle was present, Alphonse's action created Santiago de Compostela as the premiere pilgrimage site in the Middle Ages. As Christian Spain began its push to drive the Muslims out of Iberia, it created the military Order of Santiago as an elite corps of soldiers.

The Roman Catholic Church designated July 25 as the feast day of Saint James, and this celebration was carried over into liturgical calendars of the Anglican, Lutheran, and several other Protestant churches, some of whom only recognize the Twelve Apostles and Paul as people to be properly spoken of as saints. The Orthodox Church acknowledges James annually (according to the Julian calendar) on April 30. The Pilgrimage site at Santiago de Compostela remains a popular pilgrimage site, accommodating more than a million pilgrims annually, more on the Holy or Jubilee years when Saint James's Day falls on a Sunday.

On July 25, pilgrims in Santiago de Compostela are invited to observe a procession of the Order of the Knights of Santiago, whom the Archbishop, dressed in silver vestments, will lead into the nave of the cathedral. The procession is accompanied by music of instruments called *chirimias*, related to the oboe. Incense for the service is released from a six-foot censer suspended from the cathedral's dome and which is swung in a 125-foot arc.

James the Apostle is easily confused with the other prominent James in the first-century Church, James the brother (or cousin) of Jesus (Mark 6:3), who emerged

as the leader of the Jerusalem community and most believe to be the author of the Epistle of James in the New Testament. Saint James the Apostle is considered the patron saint of Chile, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Spain.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Andrew, Saint's Day of St.; Bartholomew's Day, Saint; Grotto Day; John the Evangelist, Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Janaki Navami

Janaki Navami is the appearance day of the Hindu deity Sita, later the wife of Lord Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the daughter of King Janak. Sita was one of the principal characters in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. She was born at Sitamarhi in Bihar (India) but, soon after her birth, was taken to Janakpur in present-day Nepal by her father the king. Sita was actually a foundling, discovered in a field while King Janak was ploughing. Her name Sita means furrow. King Janak adopted her and raised her as his own child. From her reported origin, she is referred to as "A-Yonija," or one not born from the womb.

Hindu women considered her to be a standard for wifely and womanly virtues—self-sacrifice, purity, tenderness, fidelity, conjugal affection. Hindus think of her as an incarnation of Lakshmi. She was believed to have taken human form to bring about the destruction of Ravan and other demons.

Janaki Navami is a time for fasting. It is observed in Vaishnava temples throughout India and Nepal, and among the faithful now scattered around the globe on the ninth day of the waxing moon of the Indian Hindu month of Vaishakh (May of the Common Era calendar). Some celebrate Janaki Navami on the eighth day of the waning moon of the Hindu month Phalgun (March), and so observe it in the spring.

Believing Janaki Navami to be an auspicious day, devotees keep a fast and offer prayers and worship to Sita, believing that it bestows conjugal happiness and marital bliss as well as worldly prosperity.

Constance A. Jones

See also Kojagara; Rama Navani

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Janardanji Paramahansa, Commemoration Days of Swami Guru (April 28, December 2)

Swami Guru Janardanji Paramahansa (1888–1980) was the third guru in the lineage of the Ajapa Yoga Society and the one who brought the tradition to the West. The future swami was born and raised in East Bengal. He experienced a trauma when at the age of 12, his father died. In his anger and confusion, he ran away from home and began a life of survival on the road and a spiritual search for meaning. After several decades of wandering back and forth across India on foot, he met Swami Guru Bhumanandaji Paramahansa (1873–1958), whose disciple he became. Once initiated into Ajapa Yoga, he became an accomplished practitioner and eventually arrived at a state described as complete self-knowledge.

He became the successor to Bhumnandaji in 1958. In 1970, he accepted an invitation to visit the Academy of Science in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and later visited Germany, Canada, and the United States. His lectures and willingness to teach the Ajapa technique to Westerners led to the founding of a set of ashrams and centers in the United States which he continued to nurture until his death in 1980. Meanwhile, he had adopted an infant child, whom he taught yoga and meditation through the 1970s, and shortly before his death in 1980, he named the teenager, then only 14 years old, as his successor. As Swami Guru Prasadji Paramahansa, the still-young guru assumed the responsibility of maintaining the movement.

Today the Ajapa Yoga Society honors Guru Bhumanandaji for his work to build the society and transmit the teaching, especially in the West. Each year, on December 2, members and friends of the society gather to remember his birthday, and in April, his passing. Services are conducted at different five ashrams and additional centers of the society in India, Bangladesh, Europe, and North America. On each occasion, attendees enjoy a feast and then join in with a time of meditation and prayers. They are asked to bring a flower to place on the altar in the meditation hall, and a dish to share during the meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhumanandaji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Prasadji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Purnanandaji Paramahansa, Commemoration Day for Swami Guru.

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Janmashtami

Janmashtami is a Hindu holiday that celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of the deity Vishnu. It is celebrated on the eighth day of the dark half of the lunar month of Shraavana (mid-August to mid-September on the Common Era calendar). While celebrations of Janmashtami can be found among Hindus around the world, the most intense celebrations occur in the Braj region, Uttar Pradesh, the land of Krishna. The largest city in the region is Mathura, the traditional birthplace of Krishna, and nearby is Vrindavan, where Krishna spent his happy childhood days.

The celebration of Janmashtami begins the day before, with a fast that continues into a vigil through the evening, a remembrance that Krishna was born in the evening hours. At midnight, the statues of the infant Krishna is bathed and placed in a cradle. Prayers (*aarti*) are said, and the fast is broken. According to Krishna’s biography, soon after his birth, his father whisked him away to a foster home for his own safety. Women draw prints of baby feet walking toward the house, symbolic of the infant entering its foster home. During the day, people will perform Rasa lila, dramatic enactments of the life or play of Krishna.

In Maharashtra, whose capital is Mumbai, Janmashtami is known as Dahi Handi (*handi* being a clay pot filled with buttermilk). Prior to the festival, the *handis* will be positioned at a significant height (as much as two to three stories). Young men will form human pyramids, while the person on top attempts to break the *handi*. If successful, the contents will spill over the entire group, which is now able to celebrate their accomplishment by a united effort. In contemporary Mumbai, different organizations offer substantial prizes to groups able to crack their *handi*, and groups called govindas (another name for Krishna) will travel around the city trying to crack as many *handis* as possible.

Janmashtami is a celebration of great joy and affirmation of social oneness.

Constance A. Jones

See also Dasain; Ganesh Chaturthi; Gaura Purnima; Navaratri.

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Jhulan Yatra

Jhulan Yatra, also known as the swing festival, is a Vaishnava Hindu festival that occurs during the days immediately before the full moon of the Indian month of Shravana (July–August on the Common Era calendar). It is especially celebrated at sites associated with Krishna such as Vrindavan, but in all Vaishnava centers across India (such as Puri in Orissa), and throughout the Hindu diaspora. Most notably in the West, it is celebrated in the temples of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

Jhulan Yatra recalls the pastimes of Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) in rural Vrindavan with the Gopis (the young women who herded the cows) with whom he is pictured playing, frolicking, and feasting. The festival occurs in the midst of the monsoon season in India, when the weather is generally hot and humid, and there are few breezes.

In celebration of Krishna's pastimes, the statues of Krishna and his consort Radha are taken from their normal resting place in the temple and placed on an elaborately decorated swing. Following the normal worship, the deities are pushed on their swing. Devotees in attendance are subsequently invited to come forward, presenting flower offerings and their personal prayers, and then are allowed to swing the deities several times as the gathered congregations repeat various Krishna mantras. This day varies from the day-to-day worship of the statues, in which a relatively few people actually attend to the statues' needs—washing dressing, and presenting offerings. The act of swinging the deity statues is seen as the practice of bhakti (or devotional) yoga.

In different temples in different locations, the festival may last for as few as 4 days or stretch out to as many as 13 days, though the celebration always reaches its climax on the evening of the full moon day. The ISKCON temples observe a five-day celebration.

The purnima that concludes the festival is also the appearance day of Lord Balarama, Krishna's older brother.

Constance A. Jones

See also Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord; Gaura Purnima; Janmashtami.

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Jizo Bon

Jizo is the Japanese name for Ksitigarbha or Earth Store (or Repository of Treasure) Bodhisattva. He is usually pictured as a Buddhist monk with a shaven head surrounded by a halo. In one hand, he carries a *shakujo* (six-ring staff), and in the other, a wish-fulfilling jewel. He is known throughout the Mahayana Buddhist world as one who works to alleviate and end the suffering of those trapped in one of the hell realms. In Japan, however, he has attained an additional and unique set of duties relative to children and has been designated the guardian of the unborn, aborted, miscarried, and stillborn. This role for Jizo is a modern adaptation unique to Japan. The added duties grow out of the earlier assignment at the patron of expectant mothers and children in general.

An annual Jizo Bon ritual (Confession to Jizo Ceremony) is held on August 24 at a variety of temples and more informal locations across Japan. During Jizo Bon, statues of the bodhisattva are washed and dressed in red bibs and hats (red being the color associated with the expelling of demons). Believers gather to confess the faults and to pray that Jizo will grant them longevity and protect their children. In many locations, the Jizo Bon has become a children’s festival, during which the children rotate a lengthy rosary made of large beads. They will touch the beads to one’s head in the understanding that it brings good luck.

Twenty-four is an important number relative to Jizo. There is, for example, a Jizo temple pilgrimage centered on Kamakura that takes the pilgrim to 24 sites. The 24th of each month, not just August, is considered sacred to Jizo. On those days, special prayers to Jizo will be offered at temples with the understanding that they are more effective on those days than other days.

Jizo is often seen in a form known as Mizuko Jizo, as a monk holding an infant in his arms with one or more children at his feet, grasping his robe. This modern development in the veneration of Jizo is the focus of a popular ceremony called the mizuko kuyo, whose underlying intent is to nourish life energy after it leaves any human body we can touch. The mizuko kuyo is in effect a memorial service for deceased infants, included those who die in abortions and miscarriages. In Japan, young children are regarded as not fully anchored in human life. Prior to the 20th century, the majority died prior to their fifth birthday, and only afterward could they be included in census counts. The impact of the mizuko kuyo contrasts sharply with the Jizo Bon, which is a highly festive event for the young.

The Sai no Kawara legend that circulated among Pure Land Buddhists in the 14th and 15th centuries suggested that children who died prematurely went to the underworld for judgment and rebirth into one of the six realms of existence.

Sometimes, trapped in a purgatorial state, they become victims of the demons. It is Jizo who will come to their rescue.

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See also Harikuyo; Ksitigarbha's Birthday; Neri-kuyo.

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Joan of Arc, Saint's Day of St. (May 30)

Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–1431) was a young French peasant girl who experienced a command from God that led her into a position of command in the French army during the Hundred Years' War. Her leadership led to several significant military victories that turned the tide just when the French forces were about to collapse. Then, in 1430, she was captured by forces from Burgundy, and was turned over to the British, who organized a Church court to try her. Convicted of heresy, she was burnt at the stake on May 30, 1431, in the main square at Rouen.

Early in 1450, French king Charles VII captured Rouen and decided it was time to begin the process of liberating Joan's reputation (any taint that her trial left on his own person and regime). He requested that the Church look into the issue with the idea of possibly nullifying the verdict of Joan's conviction.

The Church took six years to review her trial, and on July 7, 1456, overturned her conviction. The judges rule that Joan should be considered a martyr wrongly convicted by corrupt partisan clergy who subverted the process of a Church trial to gain a set of secular goals. There the matter would remain for some four centuries.

In 1869, Bishop Felix-Antoine-Philibert Dupanloup bishop of Orléans (1802–1878), introduced a reconsideration of Joan leading to her rehabilitation, though it would take four decades. Then in 1909, by which time the issues and politics of the situation had changed completely, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) officially beatified Joan. She was canonized in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–1922). Her feast day was set as May 30, the day of her death. She was

subsequently named a patron saint of France. A Mass and Office of Saint Joan, with “proper” prayers, were approved by the Holy See for use in the Diocese of Orléans.

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See also George, Feast Day of St.; Michaelmas.

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Joan of Arc was a French peasant who believed she was destined by God to help the French defeat the British and was canonized by the Catholic Church. (Library of Congress)

Jogues, John de Brébeuf and Companions, Saints Day of St. Isaac (October 19)

Isaac Jogues (1607–1646) and his companions were the first Christians to suffer martyrdom in North America and then to be officially recognized as saints by the Roman Catholic Church. Jogues, a Jesuit priest, gave up his assignment teaching literature in France to take the assignment to work among the Native Huron people in Quebec. He and a team of Jesuit missionaries led by Jean de Brébeuf (1593–1649) arrived in Canada in 1636. As they began their work with the Hurons, existing in an ongoing state of hostilities with the Iroquois and only a few years after settling in, the Iroquois captured Fr. Jogues and some of his companions. During 13 months of captivity, he was able to keep a journal describing their treatment, including standing by as Huron converts were tortured and killed. René Goupil was the first of the Jesuits to be executed.

After more than a year, Jogues escaped and returned to France. During his captivity, some of his fingers were cut off, leaving him in a condition that would normally prevent him from serving Mass. Upon hearing his story, Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623–1644) granted him a special privilege of offering Mass with his mutilated hands. Unwilling to retire, Jogues recovered his strength and returned to Canada,

where the Hurons and Iroquois had finally signed a peace treaty. In 1646, joined by Jean de Lalande, he headed for the land of his former captors. They were captured by a war party and killed.

Meanwhile, Jean de Brébeuf worked in Quebec until the English took over in 1629. They expelled the Jesuits, and he left for France, returning in 1633. He compiled the Huron dictionary and then composed a catechism. Some 7,000 converted under his ministry, but eventually he was captured by Iroquois, tortured, and executed, along with Fr. Gabriel Lalemant. Over the next few years, Frs. Anthony Daniel, Charles Garnier, and Noel Chabanel were also killed.

In all, eight Jesuit martyrs died violently within a relatively short span after coming to North America to evangelize the Native people. The eight were canonized in 1930, and October 19 was designated as their feast day. They were later named patron saints of North America. The Jesuits erected the Shrine of the North American Martyrs near the site of Jogues's death. His statue stands in a park adjacent to Lake George, Quebec.

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See also Peter Baptist and Companions, Saint's Day of St.

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John the Baptist, Beheading of (August 2)

While the actual death date of John the Baptist is unknown, it is described in one of the more famous stories in the Christian New Testament. King Herod had had John arrested, and the prophet was sitting in prison, when King Herod had a birthday party.

But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. And she, being put forward by her mother, saith, Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist. And the king was grieved; but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat with him, he commanded it to be given; and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the corpse, and buried him; and they went and told Jesus. (Matthew 14:6–12)

By this time, John had become an important person in Jesus's own developing ministry. John had baptized Jesus and spoken of the coming reign or kingdom of

God, which was to become a keynote in Jesus's own preaching. When John was later imprisoned by King Herod, he inquired of Jesus if he was the one for whom the people had been looking.

Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto him, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?"

And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."

And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, "What went you out into the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in king's houses. But wherefore went you out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Who shall prepare your way before you. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come" (Matthew 11:2–14).



Italian Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto's depiction of John the Baptist. John, Jesus's cousin and strong supporter, died for his beliefs. (Library of Congress)

Even in death, John would continue to have significant role in the development of the early church. After Easter and Pentecost, they would encounter John's disciples and invite them to become Christians by contrasting John's baptism in water and the baptism in the Holy Spirit they now offered (Acts 18:24–28).

The beheading of John the Forerunner, as he was termed in the Eastern churches, was set on August 29, and the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches retained the date on their liturgical calendars.

According to an early tradition in the Eastern Church, Herodius, Herod's wife and the person responsible for his imprisonment and death, took his head and buried it separately from his body. Later, Joanna, a follower of Jesus mentioned in passing in Luke 8:3, secured the head and buried it on the Mount of Olives. What she did, and where she hid John's head, was lost to history.

Then in the fourth century, a monk named Innocent began to build a church on the Mount of Olives. As he began to dig a foundation for the church, he found the vessel with the head of John the Baptist. Rather than make the relic available to the larger Christian community, however, he reburied it. Later, the church was abandoned and destroyed. A short time later, two monks on a pilgrimage in Jerusalem had a vision of John the Baptist, in which the location of his head was revealed to them. They uncovered the relic and left Jerusalem with it. From the monks, the head passed into various hands until it was finally again buried in a cave, near Edessa, a town in western Syria. There in 452, John the Baptist appeared to a monk Archimandrite Marcellus at the monastery at Edessa and indicated the location of the buried relic. He recovered the head, and it was conveyed to Constantinople.

John's head remained in Constantinople until about 820, when it was taken for the city and again hidden in the ground during the period of the iconoclasm controversy. When the controversy came to an end around 850 and the veneration of icons restored, Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople (r. 847–857) again had a vision revealing the location of the oft-buried relic. Once recovered, it was again brought to Constantinople, and placed in a church at the court.

The Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate this history of the efforts made to preserve the head of John, with two commemorations on their liturgical calendar. On February 24, they celebrate "First and Second Finding of the Head of Saint John the Baptist" which remembers the initial recovery of the head by Joanna, the rediscovery of it by the monk Innocent in the fourth century, and again in 452 by Archimandrite Marcellus. On May 25, they commemorate "Third Finding of the Head of Saint John the Baptist," which focuses upon the recovery of the head by Patriarch Ignatius and its return to Constantinople.

Today, there are a number of competing claims as to what subsequently happened to John the Baptist's head. In 1203, frustrated Crusaders turned on Constantinople and sacked it. One Wallon de Sarton claimed to have acquired the head during the invasion and to have brought it back to Amiens, France. Its arrival then became the occasion for the building of the Amiens cathedral, in which the head

can still be seen. The Great Mosque at Damascus also has what it claims is the head of John the Baptist, which Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) visited in 2001.

According to another legend, after John's death, Luke came into possession of John's right hand, the one he used to baptize people. That hand reputedly survived and eventually came into the hands of one of the Ottoman rulers, who turned it over to the Knights Hospitaller; they kept the relic on the island of Rhodes, which they controlled. They passed the hand to the royal family of Russia at the end of the 18th century as an amulet to protect the country from Napoleon. At the time of the Russian Revolution, the hand was smuggled out of the country and eventually came into the possession of the last czar's mother, Empress Maria Fyodorovna (1847–1928). She presented it to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, who gave it to King Alexander of Yugoslavia. Today the hand remains in a monastery in Cetin, Montenegro. In 2006, the hand was sent on a tour of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany; John the Baptist, Nativity of; Summer Solstice; Theophany.

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John the Baptist, Nativity of (June 24)

While the actual birthday of John the Baptist is unknown, his importance in Christian history is underscored in that a commemoration of both his birthday and death day were early additions to the liturgical calendar. John was Jesus's cousin, and church leaders saw his birth and later ministry as heralding that of Jesus. John would baptize Jesus and later be killed for his prophetic call to repent and prepare the way of the Lord.

John's birth also had its own supernatural character, his parents being beyond normal childbearing years. As the story is recounted in Luke's Gospel:

There was in the days of Herod, king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah: and he had a wife of the daughters of

Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the hour of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of altar of incense. And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: because your supplication is heard, and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall be turned unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him. (Luke 1:5–17)

John would be raised according to the Nazarite Vow (described in the sixth chapter of the Book of Numbers in the Hebrew Bible), and according to the angel's promise, he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. As he began his public ministry, he was seen to have the power and spirit of the Hebrew prophet Elijah.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches, John's Nativity is celebrated on June 24. It begins with all-night vigil the evening prior to the feast, and its celebration is extended a day with an "afterfeast." John is generally called the Forerunner, indicating his relationship to Jesus. Also related is a lesser feast, celebrated on what would be nine months earlier, i.e., September 23, namely the Conception of Saint John the Forerunner and the Commemoration of Saints Zechariah and Elizabeth.

In the West, the Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist is a commemoration of the highest order, a solemnity. Its observation was retained by the Anglican and Lutheran churches. It also happens to occur close to the summer solstice, and in most of Europe, Saint John's Eve came to be observed with the revelry generally associated with the solstice celebrations. The Feast Day was brought to North America, where the celebration lost much of its cultural support. One exception is Quebec, where John the Baptist is considered a patron saint and June 24 is a public holiday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany; John the Baptist, Beheading of; Summer Solstice.

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John the Evangelist, Day of St. (December 27)

In the circle of people who knew Jesus and the leadership of the early Christian movement, there were a number of people named John, most notably John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin who would eventually baptize him. There was also John the son of Zebadee and brother James the Apostle. Someone named John also wrote the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse). Traditionally, the author of the various Johannine writings in the New Testament are seen as one person and identified with the Apostle John—though the writer(s) never identify themselves as such, and a variety of different theories abound.

If the identification is correct, then John the Apostle at some point moved to Ephesus from Jerusalem, was banished to the isle of Patmos, where the Book of Revelation was written, and lived to an old age. He would have been the only one of the 12 disciples to die a natural death. One reason Christians offer to reject the identification of John the Apostle with John of Patmos is Jesus's statement in Mark 10:39 that seems to imply that John would die a martyr's death, like his brother did (Acts 12:1).

In the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, the feast day to commemorate the life and work of the Apostle John is December 27. During the Counter-Reformation period of the 16th century, a newly published list of saints' days to be observed, the Tridentine calendar, listed several days for remembering John during the week of December 27, as well as an additional celebration that grew from a story of an aging John having been arrested and taken to Rome during the reign of the emperor Domitian (r. 81–96 CE), where there was an attempt to execute him in a vat of burning oil. Like Daniel in the lion's den, he was preserved from any harm. Thus arose a feast commemorating Saint John before the Latin Gate. The spot mentioned in this fourth-century story was later marked by the construction of a church, San Giovanni a Porta Latina, and a celebration on

May 6. In 1960, Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963) removed the May 6 celebration from the church calendar, and in 1969, all the additional days commemorating John except the primary feast day of December 27 were also suppressed.

It is of some interest that the Freemasons consider John their patron saint. Many lodges will hold commemorative gatherings on December 27, and some will mark the day as the beginning of their new year. John the Baptist is also honored as a patron of the Freemasons. Freemasons also associate the two days for John the Baptist (June 24) and John the Apostle (December 27) with the summer and winter solstices.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Andrew, Saint's Day of St.; James the Greater, Feast Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Joseph, Feast Day of St. (March 21)

Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, has been an often-forgotten character. Though looming in the background throughout the gospel stories of Jesus, he is rarely a central focus, and in the end, little is known of him. It appears that he was an older man who was betrothed to marry a younger woman, Mary, only to discover that she was pregnant apart from anything he had done. An angel appeared to him and confirmed that she was pregnant of the Holy Spirit. He went ahead with the wedding. He was then present at Jesus's birth and his presentation at the temple. He took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the slaughter of the Innocents and was among those who sought the 12-year-old Jesus when he disappeared into the temple. A carpenter, he seems to have passed his skills to Jesus. He may or may not have been alive when Jesus began his ministry (Matthew 13:55) but is not mentioned as being present at any point during Jesus's wandering around Galilee. As the dying Jesus asks John to take care of Mary, it is assumed that Joseph was dead by this time.

Joseph also appears in the apocryphal gospels, and one is named for him, *The Story of Joseph the Carpenter*. It described Joseph at the end of his life at 111 years. He goes through a pious deathbed confession and asks the angels to care for his soul. The work was used to remember Joseph among the Jewish Christians of Nazareth and survived in Egypt.

In the worship of the church, Joseph was always overshadowed by Mary. In the century following the church's gaining legal status, the debate centered on Mary as the Mother of God (Theotokos), and while multiple feast days were generated to remember her, Joseph was remembered briefly after Christmas.

In the Western Church, a feast day for Saint Joseph, as the spouse of Mary, appeared as early as the eighth century, but only slowly gained widespread support. It was found on the church's calendar by the 10th century, but only in 1621 was it placed on the general church's calendar and mandated for the whole of the Latin Rite. It was observed on March 19 and thus fell during the Lenten season, which made it susceptible to being moved

until after Easter at local discretion. The late placement of Saint Joseph on the Roman calendar accounts for its being missing from the early Anglican and Lutheran calendars, though it would later be added and its spring date retained. In Italy, Spain, and Portugal, Saint Joseph's Day is also the country's Father's Day.

There was some attempt to promote Joseph. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), Bernardine of Siena (d. 1444), and Theresa of Avila (1515–1582), who dedicated her order's motherhouse to Saint Joseph, spread devotion to him. In the 19th century, Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) declared Joseph the patron of the Universal Church, a fact to be celebrated with a separate commemoration on the third Wednesday after Easter. The date was celebrated from 1870 until 1955. Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) abandoned the feast, but replaced it with a new celebration of Joseph the Worker, to be held on May 1. The fact that May 1 was also International Workers Day, when many in the Socialist and Communist movements gathered for rallies and remembrance of the Haymarket Massacre of 1886, was not lost on those who understood the pope's action. Saint Joseph the Worker Day was made an optional feast in 1969. Saint Joseph is considered the patron saint of China, Canada, Korea, Mexico, Austria, Belgium, Bohemia (Czech Republic), Croatia, Peru, and Vietnam.

Celebration of Saint Joseph is diverse. In parts of Spain, for example, bonfires are burned in his honor on the feast day. This custom apparently derived from carpenters cleaning their shops just prior to Saint Joseph's Day and burning the wood chips, sawdust, and other litter. Today, boys and their fathers construct wooden



An angel leads Mary, the baby Jesus, and Joseph to Egypt in *The Flight into Egypt*, a lithograph by James S. Baillie, ca. 1847. (Library of Congress)

structures that are exhibited in the week before the feast day, prizes awarded, and then burned on Saint Joseph's Eve.

In 1971, to mark the centennial of Joseph being declared the patron of the Universal Church, a new medal was struck with a prayer for church unity and is still circulated in Catholic circles.

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See also Baptism of the Lord, Feast of the; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Jubilee Year

In ancient Judaism, every 49 years (7 times 7), a commemoration of God's Sabbath rest was made for a full year. As described in Leviticus 25, God told Moses that every seventh year, the farmers should allow their land to rest. But then every seventh Sabbath year, an even more special year is to be announced on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. "The 50th year will be a jubilee unto you" (Leviticus 25:9). This Jubilee year was to be marked by the release of all indentured servants and the return of land to its original owners. Farmers were not to plant or harvest crops, nor gather grapes from the vineyards. In the centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem, the practice of keeping the jubilee fell out of practice in the Jewish community.

In the Middle Ages, however, it was revived within the Roman Catholic Church, not as an agricultural observance, but as a special year to focus upon the remission of one's sins and the offer of universal pardon. In 1300, Boniface VIII declared the first jubilee year in his Papal Bull *Antiquorum fida relatio*. The new opportunity for remissions and indulgences for sins were tied to a pilgrimage to Rome and the old Saint Peter's Basilica as well as the basilica of Saint Paul. Pilgrims from outside the city had to linger for 15 days and visit each basilica each day. He suggested that the event should be repeated in 1400. However, as the year 1350 approached, the pope, then residing in Avignon, was approached by several powerful voices in the church and urged to declare 1350 a Jubilee year. He consented, though he did not make the trek to Rome himself for it.

Pope Urban VI (r. 1378–1389) considered the Jubilee year question and proposed that it be held every 33 years, the period conforming to the popular notion of the length of Jesus's life on earth. To that end, shortly before his death, he decreed that 1490 be a Jubilee year. Then, 10 years later, numerous pilgrims descended on Rome, believing that it was a Jubilee year.

Pope Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404) felt obliged to respond to their show of piety and granted the indulgences of a Jubilee year, although the year was never named as a Jubilee. The next Jubilee came in 1423, 33 years after the 1390 date.

The idea of a 33-year interval for the Jubilee year had a very theological rationale, but proved aesthetically unappealing and hard to remember and communicate. Thus, in 1450, Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–1455), reestablished the celebration of the Jubilee years at a biblical 50-year interval, only to be followed by Pope Paul II (r. 1464–1471), who agreed with many that once a half-century was to seldom and established the practice of a Jubilee every 25 years. He stabilized the practice, and this has been the normal rule ever since.

Jubilee years were held every 25 years until the 19th century, when some were missed due to the political turmoil involved in the democratization of Europe and the unification of modern Italy. However, they were held throughout the 20th century, with one added in 1933, again related to Jesus's earthly life. With the steady improvements in public transportation, each of the 20th-century celebrations grew significantly in size.

The most spectacular of recent Jubilees was held in 2000 and presided over by Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005). With the end of the millennium approaching, he asked church members to prepare for the event with a year of meditation on each of the persons of the Christian Trinity (Jesus Christ [1897], the Holy Spirit [1998], and God the Father [1999]). He also moved to simplify the requirement for the performance of the pilgrimage and set up ecumenical events to involve non-Catholic Christians. The most recent Jubilee was proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI, who in 2007 traveled to Saint Paul's Outside the Walls to declare 2008 a Jubilee in commemoration of the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Paul the Apostle. Following his predecessors' adaptation of the event to ecumenical purposes, in announcing the Jubilee, Benedict also called for "a series of liturgical, cultural and ecumenical events, as well as various pastoral and social initiatives, all inspired by Pauline spirituality," to take place between June 28, 2008, and June 29, 2009.

The original Jubilee of 1300 involved a visit to two churches, Saint Peter's and Saint Paul Outside the Walls. Over the next century, two other churches were added, Saint John Lateran and Saint Maria Maggiore. Each church had a door that was commonly sealed and hence not used. During the Jubilee year, that door would be formally opened and when the Jubilee ended, the door was ritually closed until the next Jubilee. A special silver hammer and trowel have been employed over the centuries for the dramatic opening and closing, which had on occasion led to injury to pilgrims waiting to follow the pope through the entrance.

The reported injuries led Pope John Paul to drop the use of the hammer. For those Catholics who cannot make the pilgrimage to Rome, local churches, especially diocesan cathedrals designate a door of the building as a Jubilee entrance, which the devout may use.

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See also Eucharistic Congresses.

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■ Judaism

Judaism refers to the religious traditions of the Jewish people, a people dispersed since antiquity, whose major contemporary centers, in the United States and Israel, reveal a startling diversity of beliefs, praxis, and even ethnicities. Nevertheless, these varying interpretations of Judaism share the historic concepts of Torah, as both a record of the early history of the Jewish people and as a body of precepts and laws guiding its behavior; Israel, meaning the ancient homeland and the nation; and God and the unique covenant the Holy One made with the chosen people to give to them the land of Israel and the Torah in return for their obedience to sacred laws. The Jewish people today believe themselves to be direct descendants of ancient Israel as described in the Torah. However, at various times and places, other individuals and groups entered into this nation.

Because Jewish heritage reaches back almost to the beginnings of recorded history in the Middle East, the 4,000-year-old history of Judaism and the Jewish people rests on an ongoing process of interpretation of scripture and adaptation of traditions to new and changing historic and geographic contexts. Yet, across time and space, certain concepts have remained constant, even as they have undergone adaptation. Therefore, the Jews, as a nation, live bounded within a cycle of time that mandates the observance of Sabbaths and sacred occasions—the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) in the early fall, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth), Passover (Pesach), and Pentecost (Shavuot). Another cycle of rituals and rites governs the great occasions of life from birth to death, and even such quotidian experiences as diet and dress.

Ancient Origins

The ancient origins of the Jewish people are recounted in the Hebrew Bible (which Christians hold sacred as the Old Testament). It consists of three large sections: the Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), which are read as the centerpiece of the Sabbath worship service; the Prophets, which follow the history of this people after the death of Moses and into the monarchy of the great kings David and Solomon and their heirs, and which also contain books of sacred prophecies; and the Writings, a collection of books diverse in style, including Psalms and Proverbs, and written at varying times.

According to the Torah, after the creation of the earth and humanity, a clan emerged headed by the patriarch Abraham. Genesis relates the story of Abraham's covenant with God (YHWH), and God's promise to make of Abraham's descendants through his wife Sarah a nation and to give them the land of Canaan. One sign of that covenant was the circumcision of all of the males among Abraham's people. God repeated the promises of the covenant to Abraham's son Isaac and to his grandson Jacob (also called Israel). Jacob had 12 sons. At a time of famine in Canaan, Jacob's descendants relocated to Egypt, where one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, had risen to a position of prominence. Thus, by the end of Genesis, the children of Abraham went down into Egypt.

Several generations later, a pharaoh, who had forgotten the story of Joseph, feared that an expanding Hebrew (Israelite) population would unite with his enemies. He subsequently enslaved them and ordered the death of all male newborns. But one infant, Moses, who survived, was found by the pharaoh's daughter and raised as an Egyptian in the palace court.

As an adult, Moses fled to Midian after killing an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite slave. While tending his flock, he had an encounter with God, who spoke from a burning bush that would not be consumed. God told him to return to Egypt and free his people. God identified himself as: "I am that I am" and told Moses to tell the Israelites that "The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:14–15). God also called Aaron, Moses's brother, to assist him.

Moses then returned to Egypt to negotiate the release of the Israelites. When the pharaoh refused, God sent 10 plagues against the Egyptians. Pharaoh relented only after the last of the plagues, the death of the firstborn. Nevertheless, even as the people departed, Pharaoh's army pursued, and the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea (as modern scholars have correctly translated this) allowed the Israelites to cross out of Egypt into the Sinai, but the waters returned to engulf Pharaoh and his chariots.

Having successfully escaped, the Hebrews journeyed to Mount Sinai. There, Moses received a new revelation, a new covenant between God and the people—they agreed to worship God, Yahweh (spelled in Hebrew as YHWH), and God



According to the Bible, the Hebrews left Egypt in a massive exodus led by Moses around 1446 BCE. (John Clark Ridpath, *Ridpath's History of the World*, 1901)

gave them the laws, including the Ten Commandments, by which they were to live. The people accepted the covenant but, soon afterward, turned their back on it by violating one of its essential laws, prohibiting graven images. It would a generation before the people moved from the Sinai wilderness into their promised land, Canaan.

Joshua succeeded Moses as head of the community and led the Israelite conquest of Canaan. At this point, the ancient nation came into existence in the land of Israel. The story of the next centuries is told in terms of the struggle to remain loyal to the One God, in contrast to the surrounding polytheistic cultures, the struggle to fend off conquest by various neighbors, and the development of leadership. Israel was divided into the 12 tribes named for Jacob's sons. Joshua assigned land to each tribe, and a series of seers, judges, priests, and prophets emerged to guide the people according to God's will. These divinely inspired leaders dealt with a range of problems and provided some overall guidance to the confederation of tribes. (As with the books of the Torah, scholars debate the historicity of the biblical books of Joshua and Judges.)



Engraving from the 19th century of ancient Babylon on the Euphrates River. The city became a prison for many Jewish people during the first part of the century. (John Clark Ridpath, *Ridpath's History of the World*, 1901)

During this time, worship was centered at Shiloh, where the symbol of the Israelites' covenant with God, the Ark of the Covenant, and worship of God, through the animal sacrificial cult, was maintained by the priests. The site was overrun ca. 1050 BCE by the Philistines, who captured the ark. The Philistine victory led directly to the Israelite decision to create a stronger central government, the monarchy. Around 1000 BCE, the kingdom of Israel emerged, with Saul as its first king (r. c. 1020–1000 BCE). Saul's troubled reign was followed by that of David (ca. 1000–962 BCE), Israel's greatest king. He defeated the Philistines and, after capturing the hill city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, made it the religious and political center of his empire. David's son and successor, Solomon, went on to build the First Temple there. From this time forward, Jerusalem would remain the Jews' holy city, a tenet eventually shared by Christianity and Islam, the other Abrahamic religions.

Solomon's successor, Rehoboam (r. c. 934–917 BCE), could not hold the kingdom together, and in 931 BCE, it split into two—the northern kingdom, which was called Israel; and the southern kingdom, known as Judah, named for the largest of its two tribes. Both kingdoms prospered for the next two centuries. But in 721, the rising empire of Assyria conquered Israel, scattering its people—the legendary Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. A century later, when Assyria was eclipsed by the rise of Babylonia, the Babylonians overran Judah, and, in 586 BCE, conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the First Temple, and exiled its inhabitants to the city of Babylon.

How the stories of Israelite origins and history came to be recorded in the Hebrew Bible remains a matter of conjecture. Scholars hypothesize that, during the time of the two kingdoms, differing accounts were recorded, which were later, during the Babylonian exile, redacted into what became the Torah. One hypothesis argues that the original sources used different names for God—one preferring the name *Elohim* in the account of events prior to the revelation to Moses at Sinai, the other calling the Israelite God YHWH, translated into English as LORD.

The time from the emergence of David and Solomon through the two kingdoms was also the era in which independent religious voices, those of the prophets, would arise to challenge the rulers and the priests wherever they saw corruption or false worship. Among the prophets, the voices of the two collected in the book of Isaiah (First Isaiah, eighth century BCE, chapters 1–39; Second Isaiah, sixth century BCE, chapters 40–66; scholars conjecture that these latter chapters may contain a third voice) stand out for their emphasis upon monotheism, worship of Yahweh as the God of history, and the vision that in the future, all nations would come to worship the One God.

Prophets would continue to arise among the ancient Israelites even after Babylonia fell in 539 BCE to Persia. The Persian king Cyrus (ca. 585–529 BCE) permitted the Jews, who so desired, to return to Jerusalem where they resumed worshipping God and, in 515 BCE, dedicated the Second Temple. Those who remained behind in the Persian Empire formed the origins of what the Jews, as this people would now be called, have named the Diaspora, or dispersion. From then until today, the history of the Jewish people must trace the various civilizations of the Jews who have lived both within the Land of Israel, and in the Diaspora communities that have flourished and disappeared over the ages.

The Greek and Roman Eras

In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) captured Jerusalem. Following Alexander's death, his empire split among his generals. Judea first became part of the Ptolemaic kingdom based in Egypt, and then around the year 200 BCE, it came within the orbit of the Seleucid kingdom, centered in Syria. After several decades, the Seleucids clashed with traditionalists in Jerusalem and Judea. The issue came to a head during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (r. 175–163). In his attempt to suppress Jewish dissent, Antiochus IV desecrated the temple and forbade the observance of the Sabbath (the weekly day of rest commanded in the Mosaic covenant), the study of the Torah, and the practice of circumcision. His actions sparked a revolt led by a family known as the Maccabees. Their capture of the Temple and its rededication are commemorated annually in the Jewish winter festival of Hanukkah. Eventually, the Maccabees and their heirs threw off Seleucid rule and established an independent Jewish state in 142 BCE, known as the Hasmonean kingdom. The state would remain independent until the Roman conquest in 63 BCE.

During the centuries of an independent Judea, a variety of groups emerged within the Jewish community, among the more prominent being the Sadducees

and the Pharisees. The overrunning of Palestine by the Romans in 63 BCE created the unrest in which a wide spectrum of new Jewish groups emerged, among the more well-known today being the Qumran community (Dead Sea sect), whose library somehow survived the centuries and was rediscovered in the 1940s. A new Jewish revolt in 66 CE led to Jerusalem's recapture by Roman forces, the destruction of the temple, and the scattering of the Jewish population, with many moving to Alexandria.

Amid the reordering of the community, without a temple upon which to center the ritual year, an evolved Pharasaic leadership fixed the canon of books, now assembled as the Hebrew Bible, emphasized the synagogue as the center of public Jewish religious life, and emphasized hope for the coming of Israel's messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple. Rabbis also began to write and compile comments on the Torah as it applied to daily life, their efforts culminating in a new resource for the community, the Mishnah. The Mishnah's laws ordered Jewish behavior and continues to guide Jewish religious praxis to the present. The process of interpretation of the Torah would continue and reach a new culmination in the production of the Talmud, one edition of which was produced in Palestine and one in Babylon (Iraq). The two Talmuds, which differ from one another in various points, covered numerous topics not mentioned in the Mishnah.

The legislation contained in the Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud, along with more recent commentaries on Jewish law, constitute *Halacha* (literally, "the way a faithful Jew walks"). To be a faithful Jew was to acknowledge God's covenant with the community and to order one's life in conformity to God's law, which covered every imaginable aspect of life. In fulfilling the law, an individual sanctified life from moment to moment. Concern with proper behavior took center stage, although theological speculation still had its place.

While the rabbis were debating the laws of the Mishnah and Talmud, they also adapted the Jewish calendar and its holidays. The seder, a ritual and meal celebrating the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, was developed for the celebration of Passover. The rabbis fixed the future calculation of the Jewish calendar, which had once required witnesses to the new moon in Jerusalem. This guaranteed that Jews, wherever they lived, would celebrate holy days at the same time and in the proper season. It should also be noted that in antiquity, Jews in the Diaspora had added a second day to their celebration of festivals, a custom that developed out of concern that word of the new moon's appearance might not reach Diaspora Jewish communities in time for the celebration of Rosh Hashanah. This explains why some Jews today celebrate a single day of many festivals, as is done in the modern state of Israel and among some Diaspora Jewish communities, and why others celebrate two.

With liturgies of Sabbaths, festivals, and weekdays, rituals for holidays and life's passages, an ever-growing corpus of *halacha*, a fixed calendar, and a synagogue for every Jewish community, Judaism appeared ready to survive until God would send the messiah and return the nation to the land of Israel. In effect, the



Maimonides escaped persecution in Spain and settled in Egypt, where he authored many Jewish texts and established himself as a leading Jewish scholar. (National Library of Medicine)

first generations of rabbis built the platform upon which Jewish history would henceforth develop.

Judaism in the Diaspora

Through the dispersion of the Jewish community (even prior to the Roman era), new Jewish communities emerged in unexpected places. They built flourishing communities in various parts of the Middle East and on the Iberian Peninsula, while distinctive Jewish communities emerged in Yemen, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and India. The dispersion of the Jews from century to century would be encouraged by economics, but all too frequently, it was caused by persecution or the threat thereof. By the eighth century, the majority of the world's Jews resided in the lands of the Muslim caliphate, where they were mostly tolerated as a protected people. In many places in the Muslim world, Jewish culture and intellectual life flowered.

In Spain, Jews flourished under the Muslim caliphate in the 8th through the 11th centuries, but persecutions began when the Almoravid dynasty from Morocco extended its control into Spain. Actions against the Jews included the closing of the synagogues. The reestablishment of Christian rule in Spain and Portugal eventually proved disastrous for the Jews, who were banished from their homes in 1492 and 1497, respectively.

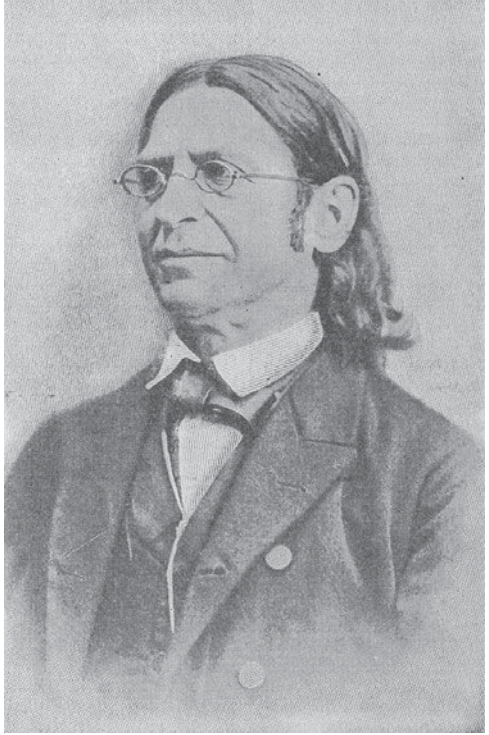
The outstanding Jewish scholar Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), better known as Maimonides, fled Spain during the Almohades persecution, and eventually settled in Egypt. He became the author of a large code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*. He also articulated the 13 principles of Jewish belief. They require that Jews affirm the oneness of God, the revelation of Torah, and belief in the coming of the messiah. In the contemporary world, traditional Jews continue to affirm these principles.

Maimonides stood in contrast to another Spanish teacher, Moses de Leon (1250–1305), who lived and worked in Granada. De Leon lifted Jewish mysticism to a new level with his compilation, the *Zohar*—a mystical commentary on the Torah. Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition that emerged in medieval Spain, saw the Torah as a doorway into the invisible realm. De Leon's work would be

carried on by Isaac Luria (1534–1572) and eventually become the basis of a separate branch of traditional Judaism called Hasidism.

In the Middle Ages, Jews established communities in most European countries. While living in stable situations in some places, overall, their history was punctuated by discrimination, persecution, massacres, expulsions, and ghettoization. Discriminatory practices were justified by the Christian majority, who blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus. Living in an atmosphere of mistrust and misunderstanding, Jews faced the continual threat of sudden outbreaks of violence.

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain led many to find haven in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time stretched from the Balkans across the Middle East and into North Africa as far as Algeria. Many Jews also moved into the newly discovered Americas. They first became visible at Recife, Brazil, during the brief occupation by the Dutch (1630–1654). There were only six synagogues in the United States at the time of its founding, but through the 19th century, the Jewish community was increased manyfold by immigration, first of tens of thousands of German and central European Jews, and then by hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews. These Jews from Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe, known collectively as Ashkenazim, completely overwhelmed the original community of American Sephardic Jews, who traced their heritage through Spain and Portugal.



Abraham Geiger, 19th century German rabbi.
(Isadore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901)

Development of the Modern Jewish Community

Through the 18th century, Jewish religion remained largely rooted in the teachings and traditions based on the texts that had developed in Palestine and Babylonia in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. However, during the late 18th and 19th centuries, Jewish life underwent a remarkable change, the result of the liberal policies toward Jews that grew out of the Age of Enlightenment and its demand for separation of church and state. The French Revolution had emancipated the Jews, granting Jewish men civil rights as individuals and annulling all anti-Jewish legislation, but demanding that Jews adapt to Western civilization in return. The Napoleonic wars carried these ideas to Jewish communities across Europe.

Now Jews, seeking to respond to modernity, consciously sought ways to integrate and assimilate into the larger Gentile society. One response was the creation of Reform Judaism, a new way of being Jewish that emphasized what were seen as the eternal truths of the faith, as opposed to irrelevant ancient practices. Arguing that God's revelation was progressive, German rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) began to introduce changes into his synagogue in Breslau. Many traditional practices were discarded, including a variety of dietary restrictions, and traditional beliefs were modified in favor of emphasis on an “ethical monotheism.” Reform Judaism caught on quickly in the United States, where Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819–1900) championed the cause.

Geiger found strong opposition among the traditionalists in the Jewish world. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) of Frankfurt am Main led the forces that would affirm traditional, or as it would come eventually to be called, Orthodox Judaism. In the United States, Isaac Leeser (1806–1868) championed the traditionalist position in opposition to Rabbi Wise.

Between Orthodoxy and Reform, a third alternative was proposed by Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875). He recognized both the need to respond to the new consciousness of history and the Reform idea of Judaism as constantly changing with the times. However, he rejected the radical stripping of “outdated” ritual from the synagogue, especially Reform's willingness to jettison Hebrew as the language of prayer. He appreciated ritual as an expression of deeply felt realities. He therefore proposed a third way that has subsequently come to be known as Conservative Judaism, or in contemporary Israel, the Masorti movement.

In the meantime, Hasidism had been born in Poland, the product of both the kabbalistic writing of de Leon and Luria and the experiences of men such as Israel ben Eliezer (1700–1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov, the Master of the Good Name (of God). Reportedly an unlearned man, the Baal Shem Tov became known as a healer, and as a teacher, he called into being a community whose centers were built around men known for one or more charismatic traits, often as wonder-workers. Although perfectly observant in belief and practice, the Hassidim and their courts were often seen as competitors to rabbinical Judaism and the synagogue. Many branches of Hasidism developed as different leaders established their work in the different cities and countries of Eastern Europe.

Zion, Holocaust, Israel

In the second half of the 19th century, Jews continued to win emancipation in various countries in Europe. For example, various German states emancipated their Jews, and, in 1871, when Germany became unified, German Jews achieved full emancipation. But, even as Jewish integration into European civilization proceeded apace, reaction against new patterns of Jewish life and culture set in. What had once been a religiously based animus against the Jews evolved into racial anti-Semitism, hatred of the Jews rooted in the idea that they were a distinctive race that bore immutable, degenerate characteristics and whose members sought to

undermine the foundations of Western civilization. Anti-Semitism provoked the infamous Dreyfus affair in France, and waves of violence called pogroms in czarist Russia.

Continuing anti-Semitism provided the environment in which Zionism developed. In 1896, Hungarian-born Theodore Herzl (1860–1904) published his call for a Jewish nation. The idea of creating a Jewish state found support in England in 1917, just as the British took control of Palestine following the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Tens of thousands of Jews moved to Palestine decade by decade.

Nazis

The history of the Middle East would likely have been very different had it not been for the Nazi Holocaust, the apogee of modern racial anti-Semitism. The Nazis murdered six million Jewish men, women, and children. Following a 1947 United Nations vote to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, events moved rapidly. In 1948, the British ended their mandate over Palestine and Jewish leaders proclaimed the new state of Israel.

In 1950, to help solve the problem of Jewish persecution, Israel established the Law of Return, which granted every Jew residing anywhere in the world the right to migrate to Israel. As a result of this law, tens of thousands of Jews moved to Israel annually.

Modern Jewish religious life remains centered around the synagogue, each usually led by a rabbi. In turn, the synagogues are organized into national associations of synagogues and rabbis. Each of the major Jewish groups, Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, and the most recently formed Reconstructionist community, has national organizations in each country where they have multiple synagogues. Orthodoxy is divided by cultural traditions; German, Eastern European, and Sephardic Jews retain a level of separation (World Sephardic Federation), and new forms of Orthodoxy have arisen around 20th-century issues (Young Israel and Gush Emunim). The national associations also participate in umbrella organizations serving the whole Jewish community, such as the World Jewish Congress, and some have formed international cooperative fellowships that serve their own constituency worldwide, such as the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

As of 2009, the world's two largest Jewish communities are in Israel and in the United States. Together, they comprise over 80 percent of world Jewry. Of the 5.2 million U.S. Jews, only around half are formally affiliated to a synagogue. Some 5.3 million Jews reside in Israel, where they make up more than three-fourths of the population. Large communities also continue in France (491,000), Argentina (185,000), Canada (374,000), and the United Kingdom (300,000).

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See also Counting of the Omer; Fast of Gedaliah; Hanukkah; Judaism—Festivals of the Year; Pesach; Purim; Rosh HaShanah; Shavuot; Sukkot; Tisha B'Av; Yom HaAtzmaut; Yom HaShoah; Yom HaZikaron; Yom Kippur; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Judaism—Festivals of the Year

The Jewish religion as it has evolved in the modern world begin with the long history of the Jewish people that reaches back to Creation, the covenant of God with the Hebrew people at the time of the prophet Abraham, and the seminal events of the Hebrew people's movement into Egypt, their enslavement there, and their deliverance under the leadership of Moses. The Exodus from Egypt was followed by the making of a new covenant that included the giving of the Law (Torah) and the eventual settlement in Palestine. In what became Israel, the Hebrews became a settled agricultural people. In Jerusalem, a great temple was built by King Solomon. It was completed in 823 BCE.

In the years of Solomon's successor, Israel divided into two countries, with one group of tribes forming the nation of Israel in the north, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin forming the land of Judah, centered on the hill fortress of Jerusalem. Israel and Judah, however, were located at a crossroads between Europe, Asia, and Africa and was thus periodically overrun by conquerors, as often as not on their way to some other targeted acquisition. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 720 BCE, Samaria, its capital was destroyed, and its people scattered and lost among the land Assyria had conquered. Jerusalem was able to hold out and was not captured until 420 BCE. After Babylon fell to the Persians in 369, the new ruler Cyrus allowed the exiles to return and the construction of a new temple to proceed and the priesthood to be reorganized, and the annual festival cycle reinstated, a project led by Nehemiah and Ezra.

At this point, the events to be commemorated and annual cycle of festivals has largely been set. The most important festivals are the three presentation festivals, when the Jewish community would gather in Jerusalem—Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), and Sukkot (Tabernacles)—and the High Holy Days, centered on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Pesach celebrates the Exodus and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Concerning the institution of the festival, which also comes at the beginning of the harvest season, the Book of Exodus reads, "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 'This month [the Hebrew month of Nissan] is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.' " This is a weeklong celebration highlighted by the Passover seder, a meal rich in meaning for the family groupings that hold it.

Shavuot, also known as the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, occurs 50 days after Pesach. It was celebrated as a memorial to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and as the feast of first fruits, a moment when the first fruits of the harvest were presented at the temple. In the days of the temple, sheaves of wheat would be brought to the temple and the days to Shavuot counted, a practice continued today as the Counting of the Omer. Shavuot ends the season of Passover.

With the destruction of the second temple, in 70 CE, and the subsequent dispersal of the Jews away from Jerusalem, the agricultural aspects of the Passover season diminished, and their role relative to the Exodus and the giving of the law came to dominate the imagery.

The next major items in the Jewish year come in the fall with Rosh Hashanah, the Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur, collectively the High Holy Days. These are the most observed events in Judaism, attended by a large number of otherwise secular Jews who do not attend a synagogue on a weekly or monthly basis and ignore most holidays. In urban areas, rabbis will rent additional facilities for those who wish to observe the holy days, as the synagogues will often be filled to capacity. It begins with the two days of Rosh Hashanah, which also mark to some extent the start of the New Year. Many believe that God decides at this time the fate of individuals for the coming year. Ideally, one enters Rosh Hashanah after a month of self-examination (the whole of the month of Elul is designated as preparatory time).

Rosh Hashanah is a time to remember that God is the Creator and Sovereign, to wish others a good coming year, to blow the shofar (trumpet), and initiate a process of repentance. The trumpet is to wake up one sleeping consciousness of the divine. The joyful beginning of the New Year is followed by 10 days for serious introspection, when the observant consider the sins of the previous year and repents of them before the day, Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, carries with it the idea of not only repenting of one's sin, but making atonement for them. It is a time, in addition to seeking forgiveness from God, to also seek reconciliation with anyone whom we have wronged in the past. Yom Kippur is a time of fasting and intense personal activity.

Shortly after the High Holy Days, the first 10 days of the month of Tishri, comes the third of the pilgrimage holidays, Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. In the days of the temple, it was time to go to Jerusalem and live for a week in a small temporary structure, recalling the tents in which they resided in the 40 years they wandered in the Sinai desert before entering Palestine. In contrast to the first days of the month, this is a time of rejoicing and celebration.

With this structure of major holidays, a number of lesser holidays have been added to the yearly calendar. Two stand out. Purim is noted as being like Sukkot—a joyful occasion, but even more joyful. The Talmud cites it as a holiday that will continue to be celebrated when the messiah comes and the other holidays abolished. It calls to memory the exploits of Queen Esther, who intervened at the risk of her life to save the Jews still in captivity in Persia in the fifth century BCE. Hanukkah celebrates a miracle that occurred in 145 BCE during the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, who had conquered Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig on the altar of the temple. Because it occurs in December, it has come to be seen, at least in North America, as a Jewish celebration responding to the Christian's Christmas season.

The modern history of Judaism has been decisively affected by the Holocaust inflicted upon them by the Nazis, the movement of many Jews to Palestine, and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Since Israel was created, hundreds of thousands of Jews heretofore scattered around the globe have accepted the country's invitation to "return" to their new homeland. In response to their history in the 20th century, four new holidays have been proposed.

Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, memorializes those who died during the Nazi regime (some six million) simply because they were Jewish. This holiday, celebrated at different times usually in the month of April, has attracted widespread attention in the West and is even celebrated in many Christian churches, which use it as a time to reflect upon Christian sins of commission and omission that allowed the Holocaust to occur and to deal with ongoing issues of anti-Semitism.

Yom HaZikaron, an Israeli Memorial Day, is observed on Iyar 4, to remember those who fought and died in the wars that Israel has fought, especially the one to create the country. It is immediately followed by Yom HaAtzmaut on Iyar 5, the Israeli Independence Day, celebrating the establishment of the modern state of Israel. It is a joyous occasion following the mourning of the previous day.

Yom Yerushalayim, celebrated on Iyar 28, commemorates the reunification of the city of Jerusalem following the Six-Day War in 1976. These last three holidays are celebrated primarily in Israel, and have gone largely unnoticed in Europe and North America.

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See also Counting of the Omer; Days of Awe; Fast of Gedaliah; Hanukkah; Judaism; Pesach; Purim; Rosh Hashanah; Shavuot; Sukkot; Yom HaAtzmaut; Yom HaShoah; Yom HaZikaron; Yom Kippur; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Juhannus (June)

Juhannus is the Christianized and increasingly secularized celebration of the summer solstice in Finland, where like all of Scandinavia, the short summer season has elevated midsummer celebrations among the most observed of activities. The closeness to the Arctic Circle means that the nights in the month of June are very short and never become fully dark.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the solstice was in honor of the sky god Ukko, a Finnish Pagan deity. The summer solstice celebration was named *Ukon juhla*. Several bonfires would be created side by side with the largest named for the god. Christians kept the holiday but transformed it into a celebration of the biblical character John the Baptist, (in Finnish: Johannes Kastaja). June 24 is celebrated through most of Christendom as the Nativity of John the Baptist (about six months before Christmas).

Today, urban-dwelling Finns will escape the city and go to the countryside, where large bonfires will be set up adjacent to a lake or the ocean. It is a time to relax in a sauna, celebrate around the bonfire, enjoy a feast cooked in the open air, and drink in excess. It is also a time to spend with a potential mate. Some may erect a Maypole that serves as an additional focus of dancing and entertainment. The bonfires are set on the Eve of Saint John's Day.

Since 1955, Juhannus has been designated a public holiday to be celebrated on the Saturday between June 20 and June 26. Previously, it was June 24.

Juhannus is also thought of as Finnish Flag Day, and most with display a flag from 6:00 p.m. on Midsummer Eve until 9:00 p.m. on Juhannua.

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See also John the Baptist, Nativity of; Summer Solstice.

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Kaijin Matsuri

Kaijin Matsuri is a type of festival held in the Shinto shrines of Japan to honor the gods associated with the sea, fishermen, and naval warfare. Throughout the summer at various dates and places, primarily the shrine along the sea coasts, the different shrines that enshrine the deities will hold their Sea God festival. In general, the sea festivals are summertime affairs, as opposed to the harvest and agricultural festivals in the fall. It is, of course, the case that these festivals occur in temples that also keep up an annual cycle of celebrations appropriate to the year in their location.

Major shrines dedicated to *kaijin* include Sumiyoshi Shrine, in Osaka, lead shrine of the several thousand that enshrines the three Sumiyoshi kami—Sokotsutsu no Onomikoto, Nakatsutsu no Onomikoto, and Uwatsutsu no Onomikoto—the great gods of Sumiyoshi. These three deities are identified with the three main stars of the constellation Orion, which in centuries past were vitally important for ship navigation. While the Osaka temple, originally constructed in the third century, is now the head temple, three other Sumiyoshi temples that enshrine the three deities are older, the ones at Fukuoka city, Iki (near Nagasaki), and Kobe.

Along with the three Sumiyoshi kami, many Shinto shrines are dedicated to Suijin (a.k.a. Mizu no Kamisama, the Water Kami), who is both the guardian of fishermen and the patron of fertility, motherhood, and easy childbirth. She is worshipped at the Suiten-gu shrines found throughout Japan, and acknowledged in even more votive stone markers found in places far from the ocean. The main shrine is found at Kurume (Fukuoka). Mizu no Kamisama reputedly originates from the one central, eternal, universal divinity called Ame no Minakanushi, the ancestor of all Japanese kami.

Typical of Kaijin matsuri celebrations is the one held each September at the Kaijin Shrine on Tsushima Island in the Korean Strait. It begins with a performance of classical music and dance (*kagura*), after which the core of the shrine's adherents, dressed in black and white, form a procession led by a group of men with lances and shields, and carry three portable shrines (*mikoshi*) from the temple to a designated site on the beach. The priest then performs the kaijin ritual, which includes the casting of some shellfish (*zuki*) into the sea as they pray from an abundant catch by the local fishermen. The ritual also speaks to the needs of the island's other residents, including the farmers.

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See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Kajari Teej. See Teej Festivals

Kalpa Vruksha. See Hinduism—New Year’s Day (India)

Kamada Ekadashi

Hindus operate from a lunar calendar that divides each month into two periods according to the phases (waxing or waning) of the moon. The 11th day of each period is termed the ekadashi day and is a day of reverence, especially within the Vaishnava community that is most focused on the deity Vishnu and his various incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. While devout Vaishnavas will fast and offer worship on every ekadashi day, some have special significance.

Kamada Ekadashi is observed during the waxing phase of moon of the lunar month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar). It is the first ekadashi of the Hindu New Year and has become known as the wish-fulfilling ekadashi.

Vaishnavas tell a story reputed to have been told by Krishna concerning the holy day. It concerns an ancient king, Pundarika, and a couple, Lalit and Lalita, who enjoyed life among his courtiers. Lalit was a singer, and one day sang improperly due to being distracted with thoughts of his wife. Upon discovering this failure to be properly attentive to his ruler, Pundarika cursed Lalit by turning him into a demon.

This action brought great sorrow to Lalita. She appealed to a sage, who told her of the ekadashi and informed her that anyone who fasts on this day will have their desires fulfilled. She subsequently observed the fast and then appeared before Lord Vasudeva (the father of Krishna) and asked that the merit be used to free her husband. He immediately returned to human form.

The observance of the day thus is seen as eradicating sin, nullifying curses upon the devotee or a loved one, and lead to the fulfillment of wishes. It is observed with a fast and offering pujas to Vishnu, often in the form of Krishna at the local temple.

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See also Amalaka Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Kamakura Matsuri

For this festival, kamakura refers not to the Japanese city, but to small snow houses that are built in mid-February in the city of Yokote in northern Japan. Most of the small structures are inhabited by children who each evening sit on straw mats or cushions around a small charcoal brazier used to keep warm, to cook *mochi* (rice cakes), and to heat *amazake*, a nonalcoholic form of sake. In some of the larger huts, adults preside and a more adult beverage is served.



Children peer out of a snow hut during Japan’s Kamakura Matsuri (Snow Hut Festival), which is traditionally held to celebrate a good rice harvest. (AFP/Getty Images)

In each kamakura, an altar is established, its outlines carved from the ice in acknowledgment of Suijin-sama, the Shinto god of water. The religious intent of the festival is to request ample rainfall in the coming spring. With the altar is a donation box into which visitors to any particular hut are encouraged to contribute (though the money goes to the children, not the temple).

The matsuri appears to have originated several centuries ago at a time when the city suffered a major drought. It is held every year on February 15–16. Following the Kamakura Matsuri, the men of the town take over the huts for their version of the Hadaka Matsuri or naked man festival, which here is termed Nonden. In the frigid cold, the men wear pajamas (rather than just a loin cloth), but in their still-scanty dress, they will carry a set of long rods that they have decorated (ritual phal-luses) up a hill on which the local temple resides, and place the rods in the temple.

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See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Kambutsu. See Wesak/Vesak

Kanmiso-sai

Each May 1, 13, and 14 (and repeated on October 1, 13, and 14) as a set of related rituals are held at the Ise Jinju, one of the major Shinto shrines of Japan, in which symbolic cloth is woven for and presented to Amaterasu Omikami. Amaterasu is the primary deity of Japanese mythology, and is also seen as the ultimate progenitor of the imperial family and of the Japanese people. She is a major figure in the Shinto holy books, the Kojiki (712 CE) and Nihon Shoki (720 CE). She is viewed as having brought rice to the people and teaching them how to cultivate it. She is also credited with inventing the art of weaving with the loom and teaching the people how to work with silkworms in the production of silk.

Silk and hemp were the two major sources of clothing in Japan. Hemp was used to make most clothing, including the everyday clothing of the imperial family and the costumes of Shinto priests. Silk was used for ceremonial clothing and holiday attire of the wealthy. Just as rice was the essential food substance in the diet, so hemp and silk were the essential items for the production of cloth. The several

Kanmiso ceremonies celebrated the role of hemp and silk in the culture and related it to the tradition of Amaterasu.

On May 1, Kanmiso-hoshoku-hajime-sai was a ceremony that launched a period of the weaving of the sacred silk and the sacred hemp at the main sanctuary of Ise, called Naiku, where the peaceful aspect of Amaterasu was enshrined, and the sanctuary Aramatsuri-no-miya, where her energetic aspect was enshrined. Two weeks later, on May 13, the Kanmiso-hoshoku-chinsha-sai ceremony offered thanks that the weaving of the sacred silk and hemp was completed. The next day, on May 14, the sacred silk and hemp are offered at both Naiku and Aramatsuri-no-miya to Amaterasu Omikami to become her clothing. This ritual process would be repeated on October 1, 13, and 14.

Related to the Ise ceremonies is the Onzo Festival held on the third Sunday of April at the Irago Shrine on the Atsumi Peninsula in Aichi Prefecture (across Ise Bay from Ise). This festival emerged as a response to the silk and hemp grown in the region, some of which is dedicated for use in the ceremonies at Ise. The Onzo Festival coincided with the Ise festival on the traditional Japanese calendar, but diverged through the last century. The main part of the celebration occurs as priests process into the shrine and offer a sacred robe to the enshrined *kami*. Among the many traditions tied to the Onzo Festival, the women refrain from touching needles or scissors on this day.

A similar ceremony is held on November 15 at Mikami Shrine in Yasu Town, Shiga Prefecture, northeast of Kyoto. In this kanmiso ceremony, the chief priest of the shrine leads a ritual that culminates in the presentation of a robe to the enshrined *kami* (deities). He then performs a sacred dance. The kanmiso robe used is two and a half meters in length and made of silk.

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See also Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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Kartika Purnima

The story of the full moon day of the Hindu sacred month of Kartika centers on Matsya, the very first incarnation of the deity Vishnu, and is told in the Matsya

Purana. On one occasion, the Vedas, a set of Hindu holy books, were left unprotected and were stolen by the demon *Hayagriva*. To retrieve the Vedas, Vishnu incarnated as a fish and swam into the hands of King Satyavata, to whom he eventually revealed himself. He warned of a great flood that would come on the land and asked him to prepare. Meanwhile, Vishnu fought Hayagriva and retrieved the Vedas.

Now a deluge ensued throughout Satyavata's kingdom. The kings, along with a variety of items he had been told to assemble, retreated to a boat the god had provided, and he tied the boat to the serpent Adishesha, which acted as a rope. (Vishnu normally is pictured as resting on the serpent.) Thus, Satyavata (later known as Manu) was saved and went on to become the progenitor of the human race.

Saivite Hindus, who focus their worship on the deity Shiva, also celebrate Kartika Purnima as the day that Shiva destroyed Tripura, a mythological set of fortresses reportedly constructed by the great architect Mayasura and made of iron, silver, and gold. The fortresses were the idea of three brothers and lesser deities named Tarakaksha, Vidyunmali, and Kamalaksha, who had pleased Lord Brahma. They requested that they be blessed with fortresses, which would be next to everlasting, as they could only be destroyed if brought down by a single arrow. They were aware that only Shiva could wield such an arrow. The three cities, located in the earth, sky, and heaven, were mobile and they moved so that they avoided being aligned, save for a brief period every thousand years. The cities prospered, but also turned evil. Thus Shiva, as the only one who could handle the situation, was called upon to bring about their destruction.

In Saivite thought, the Tripura symbolize the three fetters that bind individuals—*anava* (consciousness of ego), *karma* (consequences of cause and effect), and *maya* (illusion)—and that bind the soul. Liberation (*moksha*) is attainable once by becoming free of one's fetters, which Shiva makes possible. For this reason, Saivites will often refer to Kartika Purnima as Tripurari Purnima. It is the second-most important day in the Saivite calendar, next Mahashivratri.

Sikhs also celebrate on Kartika Purnima, which is Guru Nanak's birthday.

Kartika Purnima is an important religious day for Jains, who celebrate this day by visiting Palitana, a sacred city and site of numerous Jain temples resting on a mountain in southeast Gujarat. The main temple atop the mountain is dedicated to the first of the 24 tirthankars (saints). Having been largely cut off from the temple during the four-month monsoon season, Jain pilgrims travel to the make the trek up to the temple. Jains believe that Adinath sanctified the mountain by selecting it as the site of his first sermon.

Constance A. Jones

See also Guru Purnima; Kartika Snan; Magha Purnima; Mahashivaratri; Nanak's Birthday, Guru.

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Kartika Purnima (Jain)

As its name suggests, Kartika Purnima is a Jain holy day that falls on the full moon of the Indian month of Kartika (March–April on the Common Era calendar). It is a day for pilgrimages and many Jains will Palitana, in southeast Gujarat, a city with numerous Jain temples in the surrounding countryside, especially on the adjacent Shatrunjay Mountain.

The main temple on the mountain is dedicated to the first of the 24 Tirthankars (saints), Lord Adinath (a.k.a. Rishabdeva). Jains believe that Adinath sanctified the mountain by selecting it as the site of his first sermon. He later observed a number of his austerities while on the mountain.

Other Jains will make their way to Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh, where according to legend, the third Tirthankar, Lord Sambhavanath, was born. He is believed to have taken diksha (initiation into the renounced life) in the nearby Sahetuk forest and to have spent 14 years doing hard penance after which he attained enlightenment.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Akshay Tritiya; Diwali (Jain); Gyana Panchami; Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Kartika Snan

In India, the months of Vaisakha, Kartika, and Magha are considered as a sacred time when religious actions have a greater efficacy. Kartika (which occurs during October and November on the Common Era calendar) is the occasion when many,

especially Vaishnava Hindus, engage in a monthlong bathing festival oriented on a sacred river or other body of water. Devotees will travel to what may be a distant location and set up a tent adjacent to the shore of the selected body of water. During the month, they will refrain from sexual activity, begin the day with a morning bath in the sacred water, dine on but a single simple meal every day, and devote time to prayer, meditation, and appropriate spiritual disciplines.

In rural areas, women will rise quite early in the morning, gather in groups at local bathing spots and sing sacred songs. After their bath, they will visit local temples and observe the fast. As the month begins, they will hang lamps both at their home and at the river banks, which will be burning day and night through the month. Their light is seen as guiding the path of departed souls on their way.

The Tulsi plant is sacred to Vishnu, and it is cultivated in Vaishnava homes and temples. In the evening, an earthen lamp will be placed in front of the Tulsi plant, where worship (puja) will be observed each evening. Tulsi leaves offered to Vishnu during Kartika is said to please him more than the gift of a thousand cows. The Tulsi plant is considered the wife of Vishnu and shown respect accordingly. Their marriage is celebrated on Kartika Shukla Ekadashi, i.e., the 11th of the bright half of Kartika (the 11th day of each half of the month being a fast day for Vaishnavas) according to a ritual described in the Padma Purana, one of set of holy books. The women decorate the image of Vishnu and then carry it to the place where the Tulsi plant is grown, and there the marriage is ritually celebrated.

Tulsi will be grown in a special square pot and the four sides are oriented on the four cardinal directions. Through the year, women will care for and worship the Tulsi plant to ensure happiness. When a person is dying, they will place the Tulsi leaf in their mouth to ease their passing. They believe that placing Tulsi leaves into any water, that water becomes holy, as if it came from the Ganges.

Kartika is further sanctified by Vishnu's awakening. Vishnu is seen as having retired on Hari-Shayani Ekadashi, four months in the month of Ashadha (July–August on the Common Era calendar) at the beginning of the Indian rainy season. Since that time, Vishnu has been resting on top of the serpent Adishesha, in Ksheersagar, the cosmic ocean of milk. During these four months, as Vishnu sleeps, a variety of ceremonies, such as marriage or the sacred thread ceremony for young boys, are not observed. On the 11th day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Kartika, known as Devuthani Ekadashi, he wakes up and begins his normal round of activities. On this day, again, it will be the women who will especially observe the day with a fast, a puja to Vishnu, and the singing of hymns in praise of the various Vaishnava deities before a fire made of cow dung. This day also marks a change in diet, as a variety of new products will now become readily available.

Constance A. Jones

See also Kartika Purnima.

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Karwa Chauth

Karwa Chauth is an important observance by married Hindu women of North India, especially of the Saivite community, who on this day offer prayers in the cause of the welfare, prosperity, and long life of their husbands. It includes a day-long fast during which neither food nor water is ingested.

The story of Karwa Chauth is traced to Shiva and his wife Parvati, and a popular story concerns a young queen named Veeravati, the only sister of her seven brothers. Some months after her marriage, the time arrived for her first Karwa Chauth fast, which she strictly observed. This being her first fast of such strictness, her discomfort was noted by her brothers. Wishing to alleviate her distress, they reflected a mirror through the trees that Veeravati took to be moonlight, the sign that the fast was over. She broke her fast and took food. Just as she began to eat, she learned that her husband, the king, was ill. She also discovered her brothers' deception.

Leaving her parents' home, she rushed to her husband. On the way, she met Shiva and Parvati, who informed her that the king had passed away due to her breaking the fast too soon. The queen pleaded with the two deities and asked forgiveness. She was granted a boon—her husband's life. He would be revived, but would be ill.

When the queen reached the palace, the king lay unconscious, but had hundreds of needles inserted in his body. For the next year, the queen removed one each day so that when the next Karwa Chauth arrived, only one needle remained in the body of the still unconscious king. She observed the fast that day, but also left the palace to buy supplies for the late afternoon puja (worship). In her absence, a maid removed the last needle. The king awoke, but now mistook the maid for his wife. The maid was placed in the role of the queen, and the real wife forced to serve as a maid in the palace. The virtuous Veeravati remained true to her vows and was eventually restored to her rightful position as wife and queen.

That the fast is most perpetuated in north India is, on a more mundane level, traced to the Muslim invasion of India beginning in the 12th century. Once established in power, pressure was applied to force conversions to Islam. In order to prevent widows from being used to force conversions, the tradition of wives throwing themselves on their husband's funeral pyre was instituted, a custom the British tried to stamp out in the 19th century. In the meantime, married women gathered to pray for their husband's long life so they would not be forced to sacrifice themselves should their husband meet an untimely death.

Today, the fast is from dawn until the moonlight is seen after dusk. Married women will rise some time before dawn and have a bite to eat just before the fast



Married Hindu women gather around a storyteller during Karwa Chauth. Rituals begin at dawn and are performed until the moon rises. (AP/Wide World Photos)

is to begin. After dawn, they will dress themselves for the activities of the day, which will be spent with female friends and relatives.

In the late afternoon, the women will gather at a temple or some other appropriate place for worship. One of the older women will retell the story of the legend of Karwa Chauth. Mothers of recently wedded young women will give a selection of small gifts to their daughter, called “Baya.” In the space where they gather, there will be a metal urn filled with water, a mud pot (symbolic of the deity Ganesh), a statue of Parvati (Gaur Mata), and food items to offer the gods (and also to the person selected to tell the story). The gathering will last until the women see the moonlight. They then offer water to the moon and ask for blessings. They will pray for their husband’s safety and, if he is present, worship him in a manner similar to a deity. They will then break the fast and enjoy an evening meal. It has become common for husbands to give gifts to their wives at this time in appreciation for their effort.

Karwa Chauth is observed on the fourth day of the waning moon in the Indian Hindu month of Kartika (October on the Common Era calendar). It is one of a variety of days observed by women to show their devotion to male members of their family.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Dattatreya Jayanti; Magha Purnima.

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Kasone Festival of Watering the Banyan Tree. See Wesak/Vesak

Kataklysmos

Kataklysmos is a uniquely Cypriot celebration held on Pentecost (according to the Julian calendar used by the Greek Orthodox Church) and the day following (the Monday of the Holy Spirit). It is a largely secular festival (with a few Christian remnants) celebrated along the island’s coast, especially the towns of Larnaca, Agia Napa, Limassol, Paphos, and Polis, and its origins are lost in the past.

The festival begins with the locals throwing a cross in the ocean. Immediately, divers plunge in after it, and the one who retrieves it and returns it to the priest receives a gold coin and a blessing. That opening appears to be the limits of the religious aspect of the festival, which subsequently turns into a general celebration that includes a variety of water-sport competitions, music contests involving the improvising of songs, and throwing water on one another. The latter custom carries some limited symbolic connotations of purifying the body and soul. The name of the celebration, Kataklysmos, calls to mind the story of Noah and the cataclysmic flood, though none of the events or stories about the celebration references the Noah story directly.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Pentecost.

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Kathina Ceremony

In the Buddhist countries of Southern Asia, the members of the monastic orders live a dedicated, ordered religious life, which includes their status as mendicants, having no personal means of support. This raises the issue of what things are really necessary, such as food, clothing, shelter, and medicines. The laity accepts the responsibility of supplying such needs.

In this regard, each year on a convenient date during the month following the end of the annual Vassa Retreat, the three-month retreat held during the rainy

season, monasteries hold what is known as the Kathina celebration. Laity will visit the monastery at this time and bring cloth to the monks from which they can make new robes. Their visit typically includes a meal and a service at which the cloth is formally offered and received. This time is also the occasion for also offering a variety of other necessities needed by the monks. In order to host a Kathina celebration, at least five monks must have been in residence at the monastery. Only those monks who were in residence during the entire three-month retreat may receive the cloth offered for their new robes. Monks count their years in the monastic life by the number of retreats they have attended.

In Thailand, the king and royal family will formally present their gifts to the monks at the annual Royal Kathina Ceremony. Periodically, this ceremony has been the occasion for the bringing out of the elaborate royal barges and their ceremonial trip down the Chao Phraya River that flows through Bangkok. The formal Procession of the Royal Barges will pass two important Buddhist temples, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and Wat Po and conclude at Wat Arun (the Temple of the Dawn).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Vassa.

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Kaza-Matsuri

Kaza-Matsuri (or Kazahimachi) is a Shinto conducted in the late summer (usually in August or the beginning of September), around the first day of the eighth month of the traditional Japanese calendar. The purpose of the ritual is to avert damaging winds to the rice crop.

By August, the rice plants are ripening, but it is also the time when typhoons are most likely to move across the Japanese islands. A typhoon striking a maturing rice crop can do considerable damage. Thus, many shrines hold Kaza-Matsuri rituals. On occasion, these rituals are held in conjunction with rituals to avert danger from harmful birds and insects.

Among the most notable observances of the Kaza-Matsuri takes place at the Tatsuta (Kasuda) Grand Shrine at Nara. The Tatsuta’s ceremony was originally conducted in April and July, but moved to the late summer when it was recognized that the danger of wind damage was the greatest at this time of the year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Kodomo no Hi (May 5)

Kodomo ni Hi or Children's Day was a the designation given in 1948 to the earlier celebration of Boys' Day, a traditional day with roots in both Shinto and Buddhism and celebrating the important role boys as future men played in Japanese culture. In spite of the name change, the emphasis on male children remains even as additional emphases for the day transform it in contemporary secular society. The celebration acknowledges the many roles that the male children will soon assume, especially the oldest son of the family unit. It remains the case that to the elder son falls the duties associated with the care of his parents as they enter their senior years. As his father retires or dies, this duty may require his moving his own family into the family home and assuming the role previously held by his father.

Two symbols emerge to prominence on this day—the carp fish, and Kintaro, the Golden Boy, a character from Japanese history and folklore. The carp is seen as a symbol of strength and stamina, as it moves upstream against the river's current. On May 5, streamers will be hung over rivers and bodies of water calling attention to the carp (the favorite fish in Japanese ponds). The streamers, called "Koi Nobori," carry wishes that the son will acquire the carp's attributes for his adult life.

One will also see Kintaro dolls widely displayed on May 5. Kintoki Sakata was a 10th-century villager who became renowned for his strength as a retainer for a samurai warrior. Even as a boy, he gained a reputation for throwing down a bear as a Sumo wrestler. He is pictured as a chubby boy with red skin and carrying a hatchet.

It is customary to eat Kashiwamochi, a food made with sticky rice, on Boys' Day.

In recent years, Boys' Day has become the day of the Children's Day Olympics staged at the National Kasumigaoka Stadium in Tokyo.

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See also Doll Festival; Seijin no Hi; Shichi-Go-San.

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Kojagara

Kojagara (or Kojagari), also known as Sharad Purnima, is a second festival, along with Diwali, that focuses on Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and consort of Vishnu. Though celebrated throughout India, it is especially prominent in central India eastward to Bihar. The name of the festival, Kojagara, translates into “Who is awake?” the phrase that Lakshmi asks as she descends on this evening.

Kojagara is celebrated on the evening of the full moon of the Hindu month of Ashvina (September–October on the Common Era calendar). After fasting the whole day, worshippers participate in a ritual to Lakshmi and Lord Indra. Then during the evening, they stay awake periodically, breaking their fasts by offering coconut water and flattened rice to the deities. It is believed that on this night, Lakshmi visits every home asking who remains awake. To those she finds awake, she blesses them with wealth and prosperity. On this night, to show their welcoming attitude, the lights at temples and homes will remain on.

The origin of the celebration appears to come from Bihar state, where a story is told of a relatively poor brahmin named Valit who left home in disgust with his wife, who was known for her quarrelsome nature. His leaving was occasioned by her disturbing a ritual honoring Valit’s ancestors. On his trip, he ran into some young girls who were descendants of Kailiya Nag, the giant venomous snake that Krishna had subdued. Valit began gambling with the girls by the light of the full moon and lost what little money he had with him.

At that moment, however, Lakshmi and Vishnu were passing by. Lakshmi graced Valit with a handsomeness similar to the god of love. The girls with whom he had been gambling now fell in love with him and gave him all their riches. He returned home and lived happily ever after.

On the night of Sharad Purnima, *Dudha-Pauva*, a mixture of parched rice made from the recently harvested crops and soaked in cold milk, will be offered to Chandra, the moon deity, and then passed to gathered devotees. Devotees of Durga think of her as having gone into an extended rest following her nine-day war with Mahishasura. On this night, in Durga temples, she will be awakened with music and drumbeats and taken in a torchlit procession around the temple. Devotees of Krishna look upon this night as the anniversary of Krishna’s divine play with Radha and the Gopis (cow girls).

This Kojagara festival is also known as *Navanna* (or new food). After Kojagara, the new grain of the autumn harvest is deemed ready for consumption. This practice indicates the origins of the festival, which combine a celebration of the harvest and the light provided by the full moon in an era prior to modern electrical lighting. The acknowledgment of Lakshmi coincides with an acknowledgment of the fruits of the harvest.

Constance A. Jones

See also Diwali.

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Koshogatsu

Prior to 1872, Koshogatsu referred to the first month of the traditional Japanese lunar calendar (not unlike the Chinese calendar). In 1872, however, the Japanese adopted the Gregorian solar calendar, then in the process of being transformed into the Common Era calendar so widely used internationally today. Since then, the shogatsu period has been equated with January, and different parts of the community observe three different New Year's holidays. Widely celebrated is Setsuban, which occurs in early February and designated as the beginning of spring on the old calendar, though now being replaced by January 1 (an official public holiday in Japan), celebrated by most as New Year's Day. That leaves Koshogatsu, the little New Year's Day(s) now primarily celebrated in rural areas.

Koshogatsu was a three-day period in the middle of the first lunar month in the old calendar. It began with the full moon, the first of the year, and was centered on the worship of Toshitokujin, the Shinto goddess of agriculture. She had the power to bring good fortune to farming communities.

People observing Koshogatsu create *mayudamas*, bamboo or willow twigs decorated with small cocoon-shaped rice cakes and signs of wealth such as *kobans* (gold coins) or *takarabunes* (treasure ships), and other such things are hung from between the rice cakes and dumplings. They engage in a variety of activities such as *toshiura*, designed to forecast the weather and the coming harvest.

January 15 (traditionally the day of the full moon) is the most important day for celebration. In the morning, the younger adults and children parade through the streets (*torioi*) of their neighborhood ritually singing and beating the ground to scare away those animals known to do the most damage to crops. That evening, they will create a bonfire (*dondo-yaki*) in which they will burn their decoration from New Year's Day. They will cook rice cakes with the fire and share them with all who attend as they pass around good wishes for the year ahead.

J. Gordon Melton

See also New Year's Day; Setsubun.

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Ksitigarbha's Birthday

Ksitigarbha (also known as Bodhisattva Earth Repository or Earth Womb, or in Japanese as Jizo), is a bodhisattva who has a special mission directed at saving the suffering now in the various hell realms of Buddhist cosmology. As Jizo, he is especially revered in Japan for his saving the souls of deceased children, including those who were lost due to an abortion. He is known as an especially compassionate being, at times rivaling Guan Yin in that capacity.

Ksitigarbha is commonly represented seated or standing, with a pilgrim's staff in his right hand and a pearl in his left. He wears a monk's robe with his head shaved. His famous vow was, “I therefore vow never to become a Buddha before all the prisoners are released from the Hell.”

Ksitigarbha is most associated with Mount Jiuhua in Anhui Province, one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism. His main temple there is Hua Cheng Temple, which was founded in 401 CE, though the story that most ties him to the mountain dates from the eighth century. In 719, during the Tang dynasty (618–907), the Korean prince Kim Gio Gak (d. 793) of what was then the Kingdom of Silla, took up residence at a hermitage on Mount Jiuhua. A charismatic soul, he gained a following that grew over the three-quarters of a century he remained on the mountain. By this time, people had come to believe him to be an emanation of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. In the centuries afterward, they generalized their belief to thinking of the mountain as his domain. Beginning in the Song dynasty (960–1279), the number of temples began to multiply. More than 75 of the older temples remain in place.

The Huacheng Temple, the oldest of the temples of Mount Jiuhua, is believed to have been built as a residence for Kim Gio Gak. In 781, it was rededicated as the “bodhimandala” of Ksitigarbha. Today, it also contains a display of more than 6,000 texts of Buddhist scriptures that the temple received as a gift from the Ming emperor Wanli (1563–1620).

Ksitigarbha's birthday is celebrated throughout East Asia on the first day of the eighth lunar month (some celebrate on the last day of the seventh month), around July 13, and at this time, thousands flock to the mountain. As monks gather in the Pagoda of the Holy Body to stand vigil for the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the mountain is filled with a generally festive atmosphere.

In 2001, plans were announced to create a mega-statue of Ksitigarbha some 155 meters in height to be completed around 2004. Several years later, the date was changed to around 2008 and the size revised downward to 99 meters, dictated by the facts that there are 99 mountain apexes in the Jiuhua mountain area and that

Kim Gio Gak considered the emanation of Ksitigarbha reputedly ended his life when he was 99 years old.

Veneration of Ksitigarbha/Jizo figure is even greater in Japan than in China. As in China, Jizo serves his traditional roles as patron saint of expectant mothers, children, firemen, travelers, pilgrims, and the protector of all beings caught in the six realms of the Buddhist cosmic world that are subject to reincarnation. Jizo is also venerated as the guardian of unborn, aborted, miscarried, and stillborn babies, roles not assigned to him in mainland Asia. Thus here, his recognition is heightened and the celebrations both widespread and frequent. The 24th of *every* lunar month is Jizo's day, and the 24th day of the seventh lunar month is the grand Assembly in his honor. Today, the largest celebration is held on the 23rd and 24th days of the eighth month in Kyoto and greater Kansai, where events focus on prayers for the welfare of children.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Jizo Bon.

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Kumbha Mela

The Kumbha Mela (literally, “pot festival”) is the largest religious gathering in India. It draws Hindus of all shades of belief and is usually the only event attended by many of the reclusive holy men who spend their life in various stages of renunciation in the Himalayas.

The Kumbha Mela celebrations are spread out over the 12-year cycle of the movement of the planet Jupiter around the sun. A complete Kumbha Mela is held when, according to astrologers, the planet Jupiter (called Brhaspati in India) enters the sign of Aquarius and the sun enters Aries. Four locations in India—Allahabad (or Prayag), Haridwar, Ujjaini, and Nasik—will host it on successive occasions.

Each site will be the host once every 12 years, with Allahabad hosting it twice. The first two of these locations are in Uttar Pradesh, Ujjaini is in Madhya Pradesh, and Nasik is in Maharashtra. Each site is on a major river.

A smaller Kumbha Mela celebration gathers at Nasik when Jupiter and the sun are in the Leo; at Haridwar when Jupiter and the sun are in Aries; and at Ujjain when Jupiter and the sun are in Scorpio. A smaller Kumbha Mela celebration is also held at Allahabad when Jupiter is in Taurus. The exact date and schedule of each event is set in advance by reference to the positions of the sun, the moon, and Jupiter.

The Kumbha Mela seems to have evolved from the ancient past when various seeds were brought to river banks, dipped into the water, and then sown for a bountiful harvest. This practice was later aligned with the famous Hindu story of the churning of the ocean of milk and the emergence of the pot containing the nectar of immortality, which was carried away by Jayanta, the son of the deity Indra. With the gods (*devas*) and demons (*asuras*) in hot pursuit, he carried this pot away for 12 divine days (or 12 human years). As he traveled, a little drop of nectar dropped on the four locations where the festival is held. Hence, the name Kumbha Mela.

The Kumbha Mela festival at Allahabad (Prayag) held every 12th year, called the complete Kumbha Mela, is the largest festival in India and perhaps in the world. Here, three of India's most sacred rivers—the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the Saraswati—converge. It is referred to as the Maha Kumbha Mela. On the first day of the festival called Makar Sankranti, hundreds of thousands will attempt to enter the sacred waters at the place where the three rivers converge at Allahabad. There are a half-dozen auspicious days designated for a dip in the rivers during the six weeks of the festival.

Over the next month and a half, millions of people will come together for ceremonial processions, devotional singing, religious discourses, and a variety of additional special activities for the religious. Monks, sadhus, and holy men from every Hindu sect converge together at this site to participate in this festive gathering, and many groups organize special holiday events for their members. All the Hindu deities receive attention and will be represented by devotees.

Gatherings of the same groups occur at each Kumbha Mela, but the numbers at the complete Kumbha Mela festival at Allahabad are significantly higher. The Maha Kumbha Mela held in 2001 was attended by an estimated 60 million people. Every 144 years, an even more massive event marking 12 complete Kumbha Melas is held. It is termed the Maha Kumbha Mela. Meanwhile, local Hindu centers throughout the Hindu global diaspora will organize mini-Kumbha Melas for those who cannot go to India.

Constance A. Jones

See also Diwali; Holi.

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Kwan Tai, Birthday of

Kwan Tai, the red-faced god of war, is one of the deities of Hong Kong's traditional Taoist community, with his main temple located in the midst of the oldest residential settlement on Hong Kong island, and additional temples devoted to him throughout the region. As with many of the Taoist deities, his story begins with a real person, in this case a young man named Kwan Yu born in the second century in Shantung, China. In a momentary outrage one day, he killed a man. He then joined the imperial army around 184 CE where he had a fine career, resulting in his becoming a famous general and model military leader. Beheaded after having been the victim of a treacherous betrayal in 219 CE, Kwan Tai's status only rose due to his reputation for loyalty and integrity. He attained some recognition as divinity in the 12th century, and in the 16th century was acknowledged as a full deity, becoming known as Kwan Tai the god king.

He found support from several professional guilds. In Hong Kong, he became the patron of both the police department and of criminals, as well as those in the literary field. He is venerated much like a Catholic saint, and people seek his intervention in a variety of personal circumstances. Devotees keep the flame of an ever-burning lamp alive before his temple image. He was one of the first deities brought to the United States by Chinese immigrants, and a temple built to him in Mendocino, California, still stands.

Kwan Tai's birthday is celebrated on the 24th day of the sixth lunar month (July–August on the Common Era calendar). The holiday celebrations include a parade and lion dances.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bok Kai Festival; Che Kung, Birthday of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Tam Kung Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Kyoto Gion Matsuri

The annual Gion Festival held in Kyoto through the month of July has become the largest annual holiday in the former national capital of Japan. Originally based in Shinto, it suffered under the regime of the shogunate, which favored Buddhism, and has in the modern world become largely secularized even as it has grown in popularity.

The festival originated in the ninth century. In the 860s, an illness had spread among the population and was attributed by Shinto believers to the deity Gozu Tenno). The people looked to the Gion-sha shrine and its deities, most notably Susano-o no Mikoto, in an effort to get Gozu Tenno to reverse his curse on the city. In 869, the Japanese emperor Seiwa (r. 858–876) ordered the portable shrines at the main Gion shrine to be processed through the city's streets to end the epidemic. This action seemed to work, and over the next century, whenever disease broke out, the practice was repeated. Then in 970, the emperor decreed it an annual event. The Gion shrine, now known as the Yasaka Shrine, subsequently became the headquarters of some 3,000 sub-shrines scattered across Japan, all established primarily to protect the population from epidemics and evil.

In 1533, the Shogunate, based in Kamakura and favoring Buddhism over Shinto, halted competing religious events, but faced popular resistance in Kyoto. An agreement was reached to abandon most of the rituals and attendance on the shrine, but to keep the annual procession. Then, during the Edo period (1603–1868), the merchants began to dominate the parade and use it to show off their wealth. The procession made a comeback in the late 19th century as Shinto regained status following the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, but suffered significant secularization after World War II.

Today, the Gion Festival has become a monthlong celebration built around shopping and dining for the many tourists to come to Kyoto through the month. The reenactment of the annual procession occurs on July 17, but remnants of the Shinto origins remain. There are, for example, planned visits on different days to the Yasaka Shrine for the city's children. On July 10, there is a lantern parade to welcome portable shrines and a Shinto ceremony to ritually cleanse them with sacred water from the Kamo River. These shrines will then be an important part of the display in the procession, which occurs on July 17. The shrines are now somewhat overshadowed by the large floats from the old merchant families, which continue to be used as public symbols of wealth and power.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kaza-Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Religious Celebrations

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Religious Celebrations

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOLIDAYS,
FESTIVALS, SOLEMN OBSERVANCES,
AND SPIRITUAL COMMEMORATIONS

Volume Two

L-Z

J. Gordon Melton, Editor

with

James A. Beverley

Christopher Buck

Constance A. Jones



Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

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The Laba Festival is a Chinese celebration that seems to have its roots in an ancient harvest festival, held to celebrate a bumper crop in hopes of having another the following year. Over time, however, it evolved into a celebration of one's ancestors. The contemporary festival remains as a building block in the Chinese veneration of ancestors. In the fifth century CE, the government decreed the eighth day of the 12th lunar month (January in the Western calendar) as the day for the Laba Festival.

As Buddhism was transmitted and grew in China, it identified the eighth day of the 12th lunar month as the day that Gautama Buddha gained enlightenment sitting under the Bodhi Tree. The accompanying story told of how the Buddha had reached a point of discouragement and hunger in his practice. About to give up the pursuit, he encountered a shepherd girl who shared her porridge and rice with him. Revived and refreshed, he continued his meditation and eventually became enlightened.

Over succeeding centuries, the Buddhist and traditional Chinese celebrations merged, and however an individual thought of it, all participated in the essential actions of preparing, sharing, and eating porridge. By the 11th century, it became a national holiday. The Chinese ruler would give Laba porridge to their underlings and send rice and fruits to the Buddhist monasteries. All families would make porridge, share it with their ancestors and neighbors, and then share it with their gathered family. It would be a good sign when all had eaten their fill and there were leftovers.

The Laba porridge is made with eight (for luck) main ingredients (including beans and grains) and eight supplementary ingredients (for sweetness and flavor). Preparation of the food begins the day before. The offering of the food to the ancestors and the distribution to neighbors (and of course, the poor and needy) is done before noon on the eighth, and then the family gathers to partake in what can be, depending on the importance placed on preparation, a most delicious meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Lantern Festival (China).

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Lahiri Mahasaya, Commemoration Days for (September 26 and 30)

Lahiri Mahasaya (1828–1895) was a 19th-century Indian spiritual teacher (guru) born as Shyama Charan Lahiri. As a young man, he married and took a position with the British government in the Military Engineering Department. He also began to pursue various yoga disciplines. In 1861, he encountered a mysterious yogi whom he came to know through some honorific titles as Mahavatar Babaji. This mysterious teacher initiated him into the secret practices of kriya yoga, a spiritual discipline that involves the awakening of the kundalini energy that is pictured as lying coiled at the base of the spine.

Following Babaji's instructions, Lahiri began to gather disciples and write books. Among those attracted to him was Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855–1936), who would pass the lineage to his student Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952). Yogananda would bring it to the United States early in the 20th century and become the founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), a pioneering Hindu organization in the West.

As the SRF grew and developed worship centers in southern California, Yogananda instituted annual commemorations of those who had initiated and perpetuated the kriya yoga lineage that he had inherited. Two services were added to the movement's annual schedule relative to Lahiri Mahasaya—September 26, in commemoration of his mahasamadhi or death, and September 30, in remembrance of his birthday.

On each of these commemoration days, the centers of SRF will hold a special service, usually in the evening, to celebrate the life and teachings of Lahiri. The service includes chanting, readings of texts concerning Lahiri, and a liturgy. Attendees are asked to bring a flower and an offering to the commemoration service as symbols of their devotion and loyalty to the Fellowship and the SRF gurus. These commemorations have been passed to several groups that originated out of SRF such as the Ananda Church of Self-Realization.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Babaji Commemoration Day; Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa; Yogananda, Mahasamadhi of Paramahansa; Yukteswar, Commemorative Days of Swami Sri.

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Lammas (August 1)

Lammas is a holiday celebrated by the modern Neo-Pagan and Wiccan community, those groups expressive of the contemporary revival of ancient pagan religion of Northern and Western Europe. The revival, largely developed in response to the effort of Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964) in the 1950s, spread from England to various parts of Europe and across North America. Gardner proposed eight evenly spaced holidays anchored in the two solstices and equinoxes, with four additional days equally between them. Lammas, also called Lughnasadh, is held in late summer between the summer solstice and the fall equinox.

The Pagan festivals are related to the agricultural seasons, and Lammas is a corn festival, literally meaning loaf festival. It was designed to celebrate the first fruits from the corn that had been growing through the summer and the first bread baked from the freshly gathered ears. It would be a symbol of a coming fruitful harvest and thus herald a time of rejoicing. There would be food for the winter for man and beast, and a variety of products for the home. One additional product of the corn harvest would have been corn whisky, a necessary item for the harvest-time celebrations.

Lammas also has its negative side. It is a sign that the land that blossomed with new life and strength in the spring has given of that life to produce the food, and the life force is in a waning stage of its cycle. In olden times, this life force was identified with the king, and it would be a time for the king to sacrifice himself to the goddess for the life of the land. In modern times, of course, no such sacrifice is need, expected, or allowed, and many modern Pagans object to other associated activities of the season, such as fox hunting. Lammas is, however, related to the Irish Celtic deity Lugh, pictured as a legendary ancient king. He is seen as a warrior who possessed many supernatural weapons, a poet, and a historian, and numerous stories are told of his life and exploits. He is also said to have initiated a harvest fair in memory of his foster mother. Amid the Lammas celebration, many stories of Lugh are available for the modern bard to recount.

Modern Pagans also focus attention on the goddess as bountiful mother who is transitioning to Crone, and see in the harvest the continued transitions in the life cycle. Lammas would have been a time to reap the first fruits of the harvest, celebrate, and then return to complete the harvest—wheat, barley, and rye—and await the end of harvest celebration at Samhain, the end of the year and the death of the land. Today, Lammas is a time to pause and enjoy the pleasant summer, celebrate with fellow believers, and consider the changing times.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; Eostara; Fall Equinox; Imbolc; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Lantern Festival (China)

The Chinese Lantern Festival had its roots in the ancient past, possibly as early as the Shang dynasty, which came to an end around 1046 BCE. The festival occurs on the 15th day of the first lunar month. As the lunar months are calculated from new moon to new moon, the 15th day is coincidental with the full moon. Thus, the Lantern Festival celebrates the light of first full moon after the New Year celebration heralding the coming spring. At times, the New Year's spring festival would be stretched out for two weeks, with the Lantern Festival bringing it to a close. In a day before electricity, the festival celebrated the declining darkness of winter and the ability of the community to move about at night with human-made light. Lanterns were the popular mode of illuminating the dark, and villagers threw their artistic skills into the making of highly decorative lanterns. In recent times, temples and social groups would hold contests for the most beautiful and interesting lanterns.

The Lantern Festival took on a religious connotation from the Taoist concept of three worlds (which was, in turn, rooted in Buddhist thought). The Lantern Festival celebrated the heavenly realm, while the later Double Seventh Festival celebrated the earth realm and the Double Ninth Festival the human realm. Another account, from the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) tied the festival to the North Star. The Lantern Festival honored Ti Yin, the god of the North Star, who was seen as the balanced embodiment of the two opposing universal principles of yin and yang. He never changes his position in the sky.

Over time, as the meaning of the Lantern Festival changed, its essence remained as a way of asserting authority over darkness and a time for the general public to demonstrate its artistic creativity with unique, comical, and beautiful lanterns. The festival has lost much of its purpose with the coming of electricity and continues largely as a time for leisurely frivolity often expressed with fireworks and lion dancing.

One custom has survived—the posing and answering of riddles. This began with scholars amusing their students and friends by hanging lanterns outside their homes on which they had written riddles. This action was later generalized into a popular custom of posing riddles as part of the broader celebration.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Laba Festival.

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Lanterns, Festival of (Korea). *See* Wesak/Vesak

Laozi, Birthday of

Taoism traces its beginning to Laozi (or Lao-tzu, in the older “Wade-Giles” system of transliteration), who according to tradition lived during the sixth century BCE. He is preeminently identified with the *Daodejing* (*Tao-te ching*), commonly translated as the “Classic of the Way and Virtue,” a classic text whose ideas permeate Chinese culture. That being the case, it is unfortunate that little to nothing is known of Laozi’s life, and many contemporary scholars even doubt his very existence as anything more than a creature of legend. On the other extreme, religious Taoists revere him as a deity.

The *Daodejing* teaches of the Tao or “Way” which is manifest in “virtue” (*de*), expressed as “naturalness” (*ziran*) and “nonaction” (*wuwei*). These basic concepts may be taken as espousing a mystical way or given a more ethical slant, the tension between the two accounting for many of the differences that divide Taoists.

The formation of organized religious Taoism in the second century CE traditions about Laozi began important in a religious context. The Tao was seen as a divine reality, and Laozi revered as the personification of it. Even earlier, during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), a court historian named Sima Qian (c. 145–86 BCE) had written the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian) which included biographical reflections on Laozi. Then during the Tang dynasty (618–906 CE), the ruling Li family began to claim descent from the semidivine philosopher and today, Laozi’s “birthday” is still celebrated in many parts of Asia.



Laozi, also known as Lao-tzu, is the founder of Taoism and credited with authoring the *Daodejing*. (Jupiterimages)

Laozi is remembered on the 15th day of the second lunar month in the Chinese traditional calendar (February–March on the Common Era calendar).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Confucius's Birthday.

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Laylat al-Mir'ag

In the first verse of the 17th chapter of the Qur'an, reference is made to a journey taken by Muhammad:

Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far distant place of worship the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer. (Pickthal translation)

Toward the end of his earthly life, Muhammad is awakened from his sleep in the mosque at Mecca, mounts the horse known as Buraq (a mythical steed with the head of a woman), and rides to Jerusalem, where from the Temple Mount, he ascended into heaven accompanied by the angel Gabriel. While in heaven, he met the previous prophets—Adam, Joseph, Enoch, Abraham, Aaron, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus. While there, he came into the presence of Allah. Allah spoke the words that are now recited in the prayers repeated daily by the observant Muslim. The ascent is also important in substantiating Muslim claims to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as its sacred space. Details of what occurred are elaborated

upon in the Hadith (stories of Muhammad told by his companions), and an early biography of the Prophet by Ibn Ishaq (eighth century).

The ascension to heaven occurred around 620 in the Islamic month of Rahab, on the night of the 26th/27th. Many Muslims remember this event by attendance at the mosque, a period of self-examination and prayer, the reading of the Qur'an, and attention to the 12 commands given by God to Muhammad during his visit (and mentioned in the 17th chapter of the Qur'an). These commands are: Be a servant only to Allah; be kind to your parents; respect the rights of others; avoid spend thriftiness; do not kill your children (as a means of escaping poverty); do not commit adultery; do not kill; be kind to orphans; fulfill your promise; be fair in your dealings; do not be suspicious of others; and do not be arrogant.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Laylat al-Qadr

Laylat al-Qadr (Arabic), also known as Sab-e Qadr (Persian) or the Night of Destiny (or Power), is a Muslim holy night that occurs during the month of Ramadan. It is referenced in the Qur'an 97:1–3 (Pickthal translation):

1. Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Predestination.
2. Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Night of Power is!
3. The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.
4. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decrees.
5. (The night is) Peace until the rising of the dawn.

Neither the Qur'an nor the collected sayings of Muhammad reveal the exact day upon which the Night of Destiny should be observed, but from the different references to it, the Sunni Muslims have generally concluded that it is the 27th day of Ramadan and the Shi'as that it is the 23rd.

This passage from the Qur'an is also been tied to the reception of the book by Muhammad. Here, early commentators disagreed. Some saw it as describing that Muhammad received the entire Qur'an at one time from angels delivering it to him. This perspective did not conform, however, to the accounts of Muhammad receiving the Qur'an gradually over a number of years. Commentators have reconciled these two views by suggesting that the angels took the text from its ultimate source and brought it to the lowest level of heaven as a total volume, but only gradually did the angel Gabriel reveal it to Muhammad.

Drawing on the various comments on this night, and its reference as a Night of Destiny, many Muslims see this night as the moment when Allah decrees each person's destiny for the year ahead. According to the Hadith, the collection of writings considered most holy next to the Qur'an, Allah will forgive the sins of all who engage in prayer and good deeds on this night.

Shi'a Muslims have additional reasons to observe this night, as they believe it to be the anniversary of both the birth of Muhammad's daughter Fatima (c. 605–633) and the day of the assassination of her brother Ali Ibn Abi Talib (d. 661).

Devout Muslims will go to the mosque on this night and spend it in prayer and listening to recitations from the Qur'an, in many cases staying up until dawn in this endeavor. In a lesser number of cases, given the inexactness acknowledged in identifying the day on which the night of Destiny or Power should be observed, some Muslims will go on a 10-day retreat that continues through the last 10 days of Ramadan.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Laylat ul Bara'ah

Laylat ul Bara'ah, or the Night of Freedom from Fire, is a Muslim holy day observed on the 15th day of the Islamic month of Sha'ban. It is one of several days to celebrate the giving of the revelation of the Qur'an, and many commentators see it referred to in the Quran 44: 2–4.

By the Scripture that maketh plain. Lo! We revealed it on a blessed night!
Lo! We are ever warning! Whereon every wise command is made clear.
(Pickthal translation)

This day is seen by most Muslims as the moment when the Qur'an was sent from heaven to the skies of this world in preparation for its revelation over a period of time to the Prophet Muhammad. The Night of Power, Laylat al-Qadr, was the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. It is also the day that Muhammad completed a process of asking for the ability to intercede for the nation. He asked on Sha'ban 13 and received the ability to intercede for a third of the nation, for another third on the 14th, and on the 15th, for all the nation.

On the night of Sha'ban 15, observant Muslims will attend the mosque, read or listen to readings from the Qur'an, and engage in activities appropriate to repentance and self-reform. Prayer on this night not only is conducive to personal reform, but benefits the whole community.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Mawlid an-Nabi; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Lazarus Saturday

Although the New Testament character of Lazarus is well known throughout all Christian church bodies, he has attained a special place in the Eastern Orthodox churches, where a special day has been accorded to acknowledging him and his importance in the history of salvation. The story of Lazarus is recounted in the Gospel of John, where he is pictured as the brother of Mary and Martha, three siblings who had a close personal relationship with Jesus during his earthly life. Upon learning of Lazarus's death, it was noted that Jesus felt grief and that he wept. He was then challenged by the two sisters who knew of his healing powers. Upon arriving in Bethany, Jesus ordered:

“Take away the stone.”

Martha, the sister of him that was dead, said to him, “Lord, by this time the body is decaying; for he has been dead four days.”

Jesus said unto her, “Said I not unto you, that, if you believed, you should see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You heard me. And I knew that

You always hear me: but because of the multitude that stands around I said it, that they may believe that You did send me.” And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.”

He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

Many therefore of the Jews, who came to Mary and beheld that which he did, believed on him. (11: 39–45)

This story is widely told as a demonstration of Jesus’s power, messiahship, and divinity. Theologically, it was taken as a sign that God would resurrect the dead in the Last Days. In the Eastern Church liturgy, a day to celebrate the raising of Lazarus was inserted into the liturgical calendar on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. This important event has Jesus confirming the resurrection of humankind prior to the events of Holy Week and his own suffering, death, and resurrection.

Lazarus Saturday brings to an end the fast time of Lent a day early and has a unique status as the only day when a focused celebration of the resurrection is not on a Sunday.

The Eastern churches also have their own tradition as to what happened to Lazarus, who drops from the biblical story after it is noted that some officials in Jerusalem actually conspired to kill Lazarus—the implication being that he needed to move from Bethany. Tradition suggests that he moved to Cyprus, the city of Kittium (known today as Larnaca) and that when the Apostle Paul and his companion Barnabas arrived in Cyprus on their missionary tour, they consecrated Lazarus as the first bishop of Kittium. He is honored in the city with the diocesan cathedral dedicated to him. Western churches are generally unaware of this tradition.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Lent; Palm Sunday.

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Lent

For six weeks prior to Easter, Christians have customarily undergone a time of penitential prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to prepare for the celebration of the

resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This season of Lent originally was also a time of preparation for baptismal candidates and those separated from the Church who were rejoining the community.

In Latin, this season of the Christian year was called *Quadragesima*, referring to 40 days. With the shift to the vernacular in the Middle Ages, the word “Lent” replaced the Latin term. Lent originates from the Teutonic root for “long” and refers to spring, the time of the year when days lengthen.

Originating in the fourth century of the church, Lent spans 40 weekdays, reminiscent of the 40 days of temptation Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry. In the Western church tradition, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the last day of Holy Week before Easter Sunday. Since Sundays celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays that occur during Lent are not considered part of the 40 days of Lent, and are referred to as the Sundays “in” Lent. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the 40 days are calculated differently: the fast begins on Clean Monday, Sundays are included in the count, and it ends on the Friday before Palm Sunday.

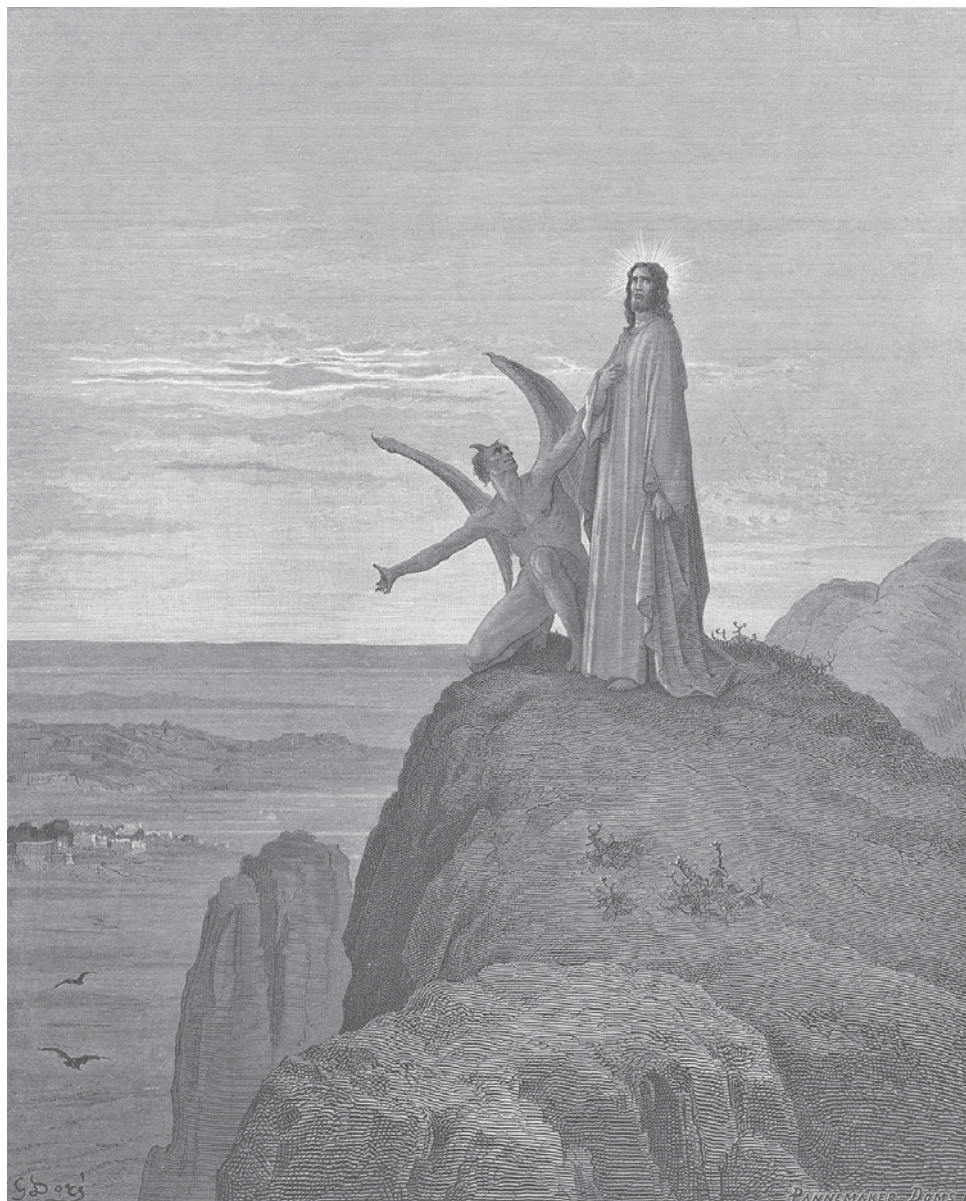
Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday begins Lent. The name refers to the ancient practice of drawing a cross of ashes in oil worshippers’ foreheads to demonstrate humility before God and mourning for death caused by sin.

There are other holy days within the season of Lent: Clean Monday, the first day of Lent in Eastern Orthodox Christianity; the fifth Sunday of Lent, which begins Passiontide; Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week; Spy Wednesday, recognizing the day Judas betrayed Jesus; Maundy Thursday, in commemoration of the Last Supper; and, Good Friday, commemorating Christ’s crucifixion and burial.

Throughout Lent, observers fast, though not necessarily every day. Historically, there has been great divergence regarding the nature of the fast. However, traditionally, days of fasting include taking one meal a day, in the evening. Often fasters will abstain from meat and wine, and the common law of the Roman Catholic Church is to avoid meat, milk, cheese, and eggs. During Holy Week, or at least on Good Friday, it is common to restrict the diet to dry food, bread, salt, and vegetables. Consequently, the custom arose to give eggs for Easter to break the fast, thus leading to the concept of Easter eggs.

During Lent, the color purple or violet dominates the sanctuary to denote the pain and suffering of Jesus and the world under sin. As well, purple is also the color of royalty, befitting Jesus as the King. Some churches use gray for Ash Wednesday or for special days of fasting and prayer. Commonly, church traditions change the sanctuary colors to red for Maundy Thursday. As well, Good Friday and Holy Saturday may utilize black to symbolize the powers of sin and death overcome by the death of Jesus.

On the local level, Lent includes a number of lesser-known religious holidays such as Carling Sunday (Scotland). It is preceded in primarily Roman Catholic



The devil tempts Jesus on a mountaintop in this bible illustration of *The Temptation of Christ* by Gustave Doré in 1866. (Time Life Pictures/Getty Images)

areas by a spectrum of pre-Lenten celebrations (Carnival, Mardi Gras) often characterized by their overindulgence in things normally eschewed during the Lenten fast.

Kevin Quast

See also Ash Wednesday; Easter; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Good Friday; Holy Week; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Mardi Gras; Maundy Thursday; Palm Sunday.

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Lha Bab Duchen

Lha Bab Duchen is one of the Tibetan celebrations of the major events in the life of the Buddha, in this case the Buddha's descent from the heavens. Seven years after his enlightenment, during the rainy season when the monks had ceased to travel about the countryside, the Buddha reputedly visited his deceased mother in heaven (Tusita). Each evening for seven days, he preached the Abhidhamma to both his mother and the assembly of the heaven's divine and semidivine beings for whom he had developed some compassion. The preaching activity continued through the three months of the Indian rainy season.

Upon completion of his work, he sought permission of the king of the celestial realm to return to his work in the human realm. On hearing this, the king made available three stairways, one of silver, one of ruby, and one of gold, and the Buddha chose the middle (ruby) stairway. He descended in the accompaniment of devas who played musical instruments and fanned him as he descended to earth. Brahmins on the silver stairway held a white umbrella to shade the Buddha.

As he returned, those awaiting his return were able to see the heavenly beings who accompanied him and the celestial world they inhabited, while the heavenly beings saw the humans who had gathered to welcome the Buddha home.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that all virtue and non-virtue is multiplied 10 million times during this day. Thus, virtuous practice and activity on this day can enhance the believer's capacity both to deepen practice and to benefit others. Lha Bab Duchen falls on the 22nd day of the 9th lunar month on the Tibetan calendar (usually November on the Common Era calendar). Theravada Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's descent on Abhidhamma Day. There is a shrine at Sankasia, Uttar Pradesh, India, where the Buddha is believed by some to have first touched down when he made his descent.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Abhidhamma Day; Chokhor Duchen; Sakya Dawa Festival; Wesak/Vesak.

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Lingka Woods Festival

The Lingka Woods Festival has been a high point of the summer season in Tibet, a land with a harsh winter followed by a spring in which it remains cold and windy. However, the summer is generally a pleasant time and Tibetans enjoy the outdoors, being outside in the lingka (various translated as garden, park, or forest) or camping in the countryside by a river being popular pastimes. The essence of the festival is the direct enjoyment of nature.

The 15th day (the full moon) of the fifth lunar month on the Tibetan calendar has been designated the World’s Incense Burning Day, or the day of the Lingka Woods Festival. Buddhists trace the celebration to a legend concerning Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rinpoche, or Precious Teacher, the eighth-century monk and missionary credited with introducing Buddhism into Tibet from India. It is said that Padmasambhava finally conquered all evil and completed that task in the fifth month of the Tibetan year.

In Lhasa, the day has been the occasion for Buddhists to gather for prayer at Jokhang Temple/Monastery to burn incense, hence its alternate designation as Incense Burning Day. They would also scatter glutinous rice cakes, salt, and *chhaang*, a beer-like beverage made from barley, symbolizing their prayers for peace and happiness. Those unable to go to Lhasa would go to their local temple.

The Lingka Woods Festival marks the midpoint of the Tibetan summer that begins with the Sakya Dawa Festival that celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and mahanirvana (death) of Gautama Buddha, and ends with the Bathing Festival in the eighth month (August). Outside of Tibet, the Lingka Woods Festival has lost much of its significance as a summer holiday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chokhor Duchen; Losar; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; Sakya Dawa Festival.

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Linji/Rinzai Day Observance (January 10)

Chinese Zen master Linji Yixuan (d. 866) began his study of Buddhism at an early age, finally settling with the Chan master Huángbo Xiyun (720–814). In 851, Linji moved to a temple in Hebei, China, which eventually assumed his name and became the dissemination point for the Linji form of Chan. Part of the larger community of meditative Buddhism, Linji Chan became most successful during the Sung dynasty (860–1279) and then was introduced to Japan in the 13th century.

Linji is remembered for his iconoclastic approach to Buddhism. He urged his students to free themselves from the binding influence of masters and to push doctrinal concepts aside, as they searched to discover their own individual true nature (or Buddha Nature). Zen is distinguished from other forms of Buddhism by its emphasis on meditation toward enlightenment, as opposed to the study of Buddhist sutras and other texts, or the Pure Land emphasis on repeating the name of Amida Buddha to reach the Western Paradise. Rinzai is distinguished from Soto Buddhism by the latter's use of word puzzles called koans, to assist the process of realizing enlightenment.

The remembrance of Linji has been perpetuated by the Rinzai groups in Japan and passed to their affiliated centers and independent Rinzai centers around the world. On Rinzai Day, Rinzai Zen Buddhists, never known for elaborate rituals or staged celebrations, commemorate the founder of their lineage with a special if relatively subdued ceremony through which practitioners acknowledge their gratitude for his teachings. These commemorations will be held wherever Rinzai Buddhists gather for their regular meditation sittings.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bodhidharma Day; Hyakujo Day Observance.

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Litha. See **Summer Solstice**

Liturgical Year (Western Christian)

From as early as the second century CE, the Christian Church, following earlier Jewish tradition, has used the seasons of the year to mark sacred times. Around these times, it has established festivals and holidays set aside to worship God and mark special moments in salvation history. While Jewish celebration revolves around the Exodus from Egypt, the Christian Church year focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus.

The Christian calendar is organized around two major feasts: Christmas and Easter. Advent ushers in Christmas, and the season ends with the feast of Epiphany. Easter is preceded by Lent and leads to Pentecost. The periods of the year surrounding these two major seasons are known in the liturgical calendars as “Ordinary Time” and focus on various aspects of the Christian faith, particularly the mission of the church in the world.

The timing of all of the other moveable feasts in the Christian year revolves around Easter. The date of Easter itself is set according to a lunar cycle that changes annually. Consequently, seasons in the liturgical calendar vary in length and calendar dates. As well, the Eastern Orthodox tradition, for example, uses the revised Julian calendar (proposed in 1923 and adopted by most Orthodox churches over the next several decades) rather than the Common Era calendar, which has evolved over the last century from the Gregorian calendar. The major events of the Liturgical Year are as follows:

Advent (First Sunday of Advent through December 24): The beginning of the Christian Liturgical Year in Western churches, Advent marks the four Sundays before Christmas. The word “advent” comes from the Latin “adventus,” which means “coming.” This season just before Christmas is associated with the “coming” of Jesus as Messiah and marks a time of penitence, preparation, and anticipation.

Advent always contains four Sundays, beginning on the Sunday nearest to November 30 (the feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle). Consequently, Advent may begin as early as November 27 but always ends on December 24. If Christmas Eve is a Sunday, the last Sunday of Advent falls on that day, as Christmas Eve begins at sundown.

Christmas (December 25 through to Epiphany): The Christmas season begins with the celebration of the birth of Jesus, Christmas Day, or as a vigil on Christmas Eve. The *Feast* of Christmas lasts 12 days, until Epiphany. The Christmas season is a time of rejoicing in the Incarnation. Christmas probably originated in the Roman culture, which celebrated the winter solstice on December 25, the shortest day of the year. It was a Pagan celebration of the birth of “The Invincible Sun” as it began its annual journey back north from its southernmost point. It is likely that Christians began celebrating the birth of Jesus at this time as an alternative to the Pagan observance of the winter solstice.

Epiphany: Falling on January 6, Epiphany is a Christian feast that celebrates the revelation of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. In Greek, the word “epiphany” means “manifestation,” and in Eastern Christian tradition, the event is called “Theophany,” which means “manifestation of God.” In the Eastern tradition, it falls on January 19. Roman Catholics will often celebrate it on the Sunday closest to January 6.

The Western observance commemorates the visitation of the Biblical Magi to the child Jesus, stressing the appearance of Jesus to the Gentiles. In many Hispanic and European churches, it is also known as “Three Kings Day.” Eastern Christians include the baptism of Jesus in their celebration, highlighting Christ’s revelation to the world as the Son of God.

Marking the 12th day of Christmas, Epiphany brings to an end the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Ordinary Time after the Baptism (Monday after the Epiphany through to Lent): This season focuses on the early life and childhood of Christ, and then on his public ministry.

Lent (Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday): The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts until the final Saturday before Easter, Holy Saturday. It includes “Holy Week,” the week before Easter. For six weeks preceding Easter, it is a time of penitential prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to prepare for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This season of Lent originally was also of a time of preparation for baptismal candidates and those separated from the Church who were rejoining the community.

Holy Week, the last week of Lent, commemorates the last week of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. It covers the events of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the last supper, the arrest, and his death by crucifixion. Beginning with the sixth Sunday of Lent, Holy Week includes Palm Sunday, Spy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.

Easter (Easter Vigil through Pentecost): The high feast of the Christian church, Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even churches that typically do not follow the liturgical calendar observe Easter. Easter Sunday begins a 50-day season of “Eastertide” that includes Ascension Day and leads to Pentecost.

The Easter Vigil is celebrated after night falls on the evening before Easter Sunday. It incorporates a “new light” ceremony in the form of candle lighting and, often, an outdoor sunrise service. Typically, new converts to the church are baptized on Easter Sunday.

Six weeks into Easter, the church celebrates Ascension Day, a commemoration of the bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven. Until recently, this holy day fell on the sixth Thursday after Easter Sunday, the traditional 40 days between the resurrection and ascension in the biblical narrative. However, some Roman Catholic provinces have moved the celebration to the following Sunday to facilitate the obligation of the faithful to receive Mass as part of the Feast.

The last day of the Easter season is Pentecost, the festival that marks the birth of the Christian church by the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles 2:1–41. The word “Pentecost” means “50th day” and is so named because it is celebrated 50 days after Easter Sunday.

Ordinary Time after Pentecost (the day after Pentecost through the final day before Advent): The second period of Ordinary Time is the longest liturgical season. Ordinary Time resumes after Pentecost and runs until the final Saturday before Advent. This period of Ordinary Time focuses on Christ’s reign as King of kings, and on the age of the Church. It is meant to be a time of growth as the church meditates on the teachings of the Bible and their application to the Christian life. This is the present time between the age of the Apostles and the age of Christ’s second coming. The final Sunday in Ordinary Time is the Feast of Christ the King; the Saturday after this feast is the final day of Ordinary Time. The cycle repeats itself with the beginning of Advent.

Kevin Quast

See also Advent; Ascension Day; Calendars, Religious; Christmas; Common Era Calendar; Easter; Epiphany; Holy Week; Lent; Pentecost.

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Lorenzo Ruiz, Saint's Day of St. (September 28)

Lorenzo Ruiz (c. 1600–1637), was born in Manila, Philippines, of a Chinese father and a Filipino mother. He was raised a Roman Catholic and received his education from the Dominicans, during which time he gained a reputation as a calligrapher. He married and had three children. He appeared to be heading for a relatively uneventful life as a devout lay member of the Binondo Roman Catholic Church in his hometown.

Then in 1636, his life was turned upside down when he was falsely accused of killing a member of the Spanish elite that ruled the Philippines at the time. Fearing for his life, he left his community bound for Japan on board a ship with some of his Dominican acquaintances. The ship made its way to Okinawa, but upon their disembarkation, Ruiz and all the Dominican brothers were arrested and taken to Nagasaki. Here, with no chance to defend themselves, they were tortured in various ways to force them to recant their faith. Several did, but Ruiz and those who remained faithful were finally taken to a spot execution and hung upside down. Two days later, on September 29, Ruiz died. His body was cremated and the remains thrown into the sea.

It would be several centuries before Ruiz's martyrdom was recognized by the church. Finally, as part of his visit to the Philippines, on February 18, 1981, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) held the first ceremony outside of Rome for the beatification of a future saint. Ruiz was canonized in Rome in ceremonies in 1987. He became the first Filipino whose saintly status was recognized by the church.

The international Filipino community began to promote devotion to San Lorenzo. In the United States, credit has been given to Fr. Erno Diaz, a priest in the New York in the 1980s who organized an annual Mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral on his feast day, September 28. Fr. Diaz went on to become the director of Manhattan's the Chapel of San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first chapel in America formally designated for the use of Filipino Americans.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Forty Martyrs' Day.

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Losar

Losar, the Tibetan New Year, begins the annual cycle of religious celebrations for Tibetan Buddhists. As the Tibetans have a lunar calendar not unlike that of the Chinese, Losar is generally in the month of February on the Common Era calendar. It usually coincides with the Chinese New Year, but may vary by as much as a month. Every three to four years, a 13th month is added to the calendar to keep the lunar calendar in sync with the solar year. Months begin with a new moon.

Losar seems to have originated as an autumn festival celebrated at different times relative to the local harvest in pre-Buddhist times. Following the emergence of Buddhism in the eighth century CE and its subsequent growth to a position of religious dominance, it evolved into a Buddhist celebration. In the 13th century, Lama Drogon Choegyal Phagpa advocated the setting of the New Year on the present date. The date was subsequently accepted by the Buddhist leadership and became the dominant practice, though divergent Losar celebrations continued locally into the 20th century. Losar is celebrated in Tibet (now the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China), Bhutan, and among adherents of Tibetan Buddhism in India and worldwide. The second-largest group of Tibetans now resides in China apart from Tibet.

Losar begins on the first day of the first month and officially lasts for 15 days (new moon to full moon), though the major celebration occurs on the first three days. The celebration of Losar has been radically affected by the incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China in the 1950s and the accompanying exile of the Dalai Lama, as an important site for the traditional celebration was the Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama's residence in Lhasa, Tibet.

Prior to the 1950s, Losar began in the early morning with the gathering of the monks at of Namgyal Monastery (a part of the Potala Palace), where a ritual would ensue honoring the Dharma protector Palden Lhamo, a goddess who is considered the protector of Tibet. The ceremony would be led by the Dalai Lama, and the leading lamas (considered reincarnated emanation of the various deities) and various government officials would join in the ceremony. Following the service, all would gather in the Excellence of Samsara and Nirvana halls to exchange New Year's greetings. Since the relocation of the Dalai Lama to Dharamsala, a new Namgyal Monastery has been constructed along with branches in various countries in which a Tibetan Buddhist community has developed. Namgyal Monastery in Ithaca, New York, for example, serves as the North American seat of the present Dalai Lama.

Following the assumption of authority by the Chinese in Tibet, the celebration of Losar fell as part of the general suppression of Tibetan Buddhism that included

widespread destruction of the many monasteries and disbanding of monastic communities. In the years since the Cultural Revolution, Tibetan Buddhism has revived, and many of the monasteries have been rebuilt. Losar is now celebrated, though without the former ceremonies surrounding the person of the Dalai Lama. In the new century, the celebration has been somewhat politicized and muted as monks have used it to make statements about their wish that Tibet regain its independence and that the Dalai Lama be allowed to return. Currently, the majority of Tibetans (four million out of seven million) reside outside their homeland.

The festivities of the first day of Losar continued with the offering of well wishes to the Dalai Lama symbolized in small cakes made from roasted barley that would be presented by the abbots of the three major Tibetan monasteries and other high officials. Entertainment of the assembled dignitaries would include dancing performances and a lively theological debate by the monks, and a ceremony bidding farewell to the Dalai Lama as he retired for the evening to his residence. Various aspects of the traditional day may be repeated in Dharamsala, while dancing, theological discourses, and general festivities will occur in Tibetan Buddhist temples worldwide.

The second day of Losar was traditionally a more secular political occasion, recognizing that the Dalai Lama was also the head of state of Tibet. The day featured a gathering again in the Excellence of Samsara and Nirvana halls, where the Dalai Lama and various high religious officials received and exchanged greetings with the ambassadors of those countries bordering Tibet—China, India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Mongolia. This event now occurs in Dharamsala.

The third day of Losar launches two weeks of general festive activity with times for parties, special foods, and drink. While Tibetan Buddhism generally frowned upon the consumption of alcohol, two alcoholic drinks—*chhaang*, a beer-like beverage made from barley and *raksi*, a distilled beverage made from millet—were often consumed during this time.

While ceremonies and rituals are being enacted at the higher levels of the religious community, the majority of the people has their own festive activities. These usually begin on New Year's Eve with a cleansing and decoration of the home to drive away any accumulated evil influences. A variety of actions, including the use of fireworks, aim at driving off evil spirits. The first day of Losar is a time to light lamps (fueled with butter) to the deities and on the second day to begin visits to one's neighbors and relatives.

On the fourth day, the two weeks of Losar festivities begin to overlap with a second important Tibetan Buddhist holiday celebration, the week of Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival (see separate entry), and until the full moon, both holidays will be celebrated simultaneously. Losar culminates with the Butter Lamp Festival on the full moon (15th day of the first lunar month).

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See also Butter Lamp Festival; Lingka Woods Festival; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; New Year's Day; Sakya Dawa Festival.

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Lotus, Birthday of the

Amid their love of flowers in general, the Chinese single out the lotus for special consideration, with content for the honoring the flower with its own birthday celebration coming from all the Indian and Chinese lore that have allowed it a special place in both the religious and secular community. In Hinduism, out of which Buddhism sprang, the goddess Lakshmi emerged from a lotus that came from Vishnu's forehead, while Vishnu himself holds in his four hands a conch, a wheel, a mace, and a lotus. Enlightenment is often described as the opening of a lotus. While yogis sit in the lotus position, the Buddha is often depicted sitting on a lotus and/or grasping a lotus in his right hand.

The Chinese have designated the sixth moon of their lunar calendar the Lotus moon. They celebrate the birthday of the lotus on the 24th day of the sixth month. In Beijing, people will visit the Winter Palace to view the large pink lotuses blooming in the lakes. Ancient lore suggests the blooming lotus signifies that the Dragon-Prince has answered numerous prayers, especially those for sufficient rain to produce an abundant harvest.

Earlier in the year, the Chinese have celebrated a birthday for all flowers during the second lunar month on the 12th (in Beijing), or on the 15th elsewhere.

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See also Flower Communion; Mother's Day; White Lotus Day.

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Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of (February 11)

In 1858, Lourdes, a small town in southern France near the Spanish border, became the site of the most well-known modern apparition of the Blessed Virgin



Pilgrims come to view and pray at the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Lourdes, France. (Bernadette Rigal-Cellard)

Mary. That year, a young girl named Bernadette Soubirous (1844–1879) had visions of the Virgin over a period of six months. The initial vision occurred on February 11, a few days after she had received her first communion at the local church, her village being a Roman Catholic community. As she searched for wood near a grotto, her attention was drawn to a moving rosebush, and shortly thereafter, what she would described as a young and beautiful woman appeared above the bush. Bernadette immediately dropped to her knees and began to pray and was joined by the woman. The woman then disappeared without saying anything.

The lady, eventually established to be the Virgin Mary, appeared on 18 subsequent occasions over the next six months. Bernadette first heard her speak during the third apparition. Her ninth appearance became a key event, as she instructed Bernadette to dig in the ground. Water would emerge, and she was to drink from and bathe in that water. At the spot she dug, a spring began to flow. That spring would then be seen as flowing with healing water available for all. The lady finally instructed Bernadette to see to the building of a chapel at the grotto.

The local priest, who saw Bernadette as naïve and somewhat ignorant, pressed her to inquire of the identity of the lady she was seeing and with whom she was conversing, especially after the request to build the chapel was made. Finally, in her last appearance, the lady identified herself as the Immaculate Conception. At the time, Catholic theologians of the day were pursuing a full inquiry into the viability of the concept of Immaculate Conception, the idea that the Virgin Mary had been born without original sin. (Among non-Catholics, the idea of the

Immaculate Conception is often confused with Jesus's birth from a virgin, rather than Mary's birth without sin.) That Bernadette came forward with this somewhat sophisticated idea served to convince the parish priest that she was, in fact, in contact with the Virgin.

The increasingly secularized French public and government officials did not accept Bernadette's claims as readily as the priest. Even as Lourdes gained fame as a healing shrine, government officials occasionally moved against it and, at one point, closed it for several years. In 1862, however, the local bishop declared that the faithful were "justified in believing the reality of the apparition." A basilica church was built, and in 1873, the large pilgrimages were inaugurated. In 1876, the basilica was consecrated and the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes was crowned.

Meanwhile, Bernadette lived quietly and during this time suffered from a spectrum of illnesses. Her health having become an obstacle to her entrance into a religious order, the local bishop put pressure in the Sisters of Nevers, who eventually found a place for her at the Convent of Saint-Gildard. She lived only a short time and passed away on April 16, 1879, at the convent's infirmary.

After remaining on view for three days, her body was placed in a coffin on April 19 and it was sealed in the presence of a number of witnesses, and on May 30, 1879, the coffin was transferred to the convent's chapel. In 1909 the coffin was opened, and officials discovered that her body had remained uncorrupted. This discovery merely added to her reputation. To this day, her body remains on view at the Nevers chapel.

During Bernadette's stay at the convent, the spring continued to flow and the grotto of the apparitions became the source of a growing number of reported cures. Tens of thousands of reported cures were claimed, though only a small percentage passed the very strict standards of the medical bureau that was established to examine different cases and assemble records of those that appeared to be medically unexplainable.

In 1883, the foundation was laid for a second larger church that was finished and consecrated in 1901 as the Church of the Rosary. Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) authorized a special office and a Mass to commemorate the apparitions. Six years later, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) extended the observance of this feast, which came to be observed on February 11, to the entire Church.

In 1933, Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) canonized Bernadette. A new church, the Basilica of Saint Pius X, was dedicated by Angelo Cardinal Roncalli (1881–1963) then the Papal Nuncio to France and later known as Pope John XXIII. The innovative building, largely underground, can accommodate a crowd of 30,000.

In 1992, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) inaugurated the annual celebration of the World Day of the Sick, as a day to listen and reflect on the mystery of pain and illness. This new celebration was specifically tied to the commemoration of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11 beginning in 1993.

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See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Rosary, Feast of Our Lady of the.

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Lucy, Saint's Day of St. (December 13)

The day of Saint Lucy, or Lucia's Day, is the annual commemoration of a young woman about whom almost nothing is known. Lucy (283–304) lived in Syracuse, a city of eastern Sicily, at the beginning of the fourth century. All that is known is that she turned back a suitor as she wished to remain a virgin, and in his disappointment, he accused her of being a Christian. She was then executed in the year 304 CE, during the widespread persecution of Christians by the emperor Diocletian, for her faith, and was subsequently remembered as a saint martyr.

Modern scholars relate Lucy's story to pre-Christian Paganism. Lucy's name means "light." There was a Sabine (central Italy) deity named Lucina who was the goddess of light. She is on occasion shown carrying a plate of cakes and a lamp. She was related to Juno, the wife of Jupiter, who as Juno Lucina was the goddess of childbirth. As the winter solstice came and went, Juno Lucina could be seen as the midwife of the miraculous sun-child born at Yule.

Drawing on the older account of Lucy's martyrdom, Christians embellished her story. They told of a suitor admiring her beautiful eyes. She responded by cutting them out and sending them to him with a request that she be left alone. She was subsequently been designated the patron saint of eye diseases and the blind. She would later be depicted, like Sabine, carrying a plate, but with eyeballs on it instead of cakes.

The celebration of Saint Lucy's Day is generally identified with the various Scandinavian countries—formerly Catholic, but now largely Protestant. It appears that the veneration of Lucy emerged in strength in the Middle Ages, and though it continued into the years of the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century, it gradually died out. The celebration of the day was reborn in Sweden in the late 18th century by families in the area of Lake Vanern, north of Göteborg. What

began as a family celebration evolved in the early 20th century into a more public celebration in which a young woman is selected to portray Lucia, dressed in a white robe with a wreath with candles in her hair and a selection of similarly clad attendants, each of whom carries a candle. While the girl chosen to portray Lucy is the center of attention, the modern celebrations offer roles for many young people and the procession around which the celebration is built but the start of a wide range of wintertime and Christmas-related activities.

The popularity of Saint Lucy's Day spread from Sweden to the neighboring Scandinavian countries and the diaspora communities in North America. It seems to have resonated with the desire for light through the long dark winter in far northern climes, where in the dead of winter, daylight may be cut to a few hours or less. It has been an especially popular occasion for school-based parties, a last time to celebrate with classmates before the Christmas holidays.

In many Catholic and Anglican countries, Saint Lucy's Day signaled the arrival of one of the four sets of Ember Days, solemn fast days on the following Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

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See also Agnes, Feast Day of St.; Christmas; Ember Days; Florian, Saint's Day of St.; George, Feast Day of St.

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Lughnasad. See Lammas

M

Mabon. See Fall Equinox

Madeleine, Fête de la (July 22)

Among the many tales that became attached to Mary Magdalene is that soon after the crucifixion of Jesus, she joined a circle of Jesus's close followers and left Palestine in a boat that eventually arrived in Provence, France. Once landed, the groups separated and went to various locations to evangelize the country. Two of the female followers on the trip, Marie Jacobe, the sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Marie Solomé, the mother of the apostles James and John, would settle in Provence near the landing site and work among the local people, including the Romany people. Their burial site would occasion the building of the Church of Notre Dame de la Mer, and the celebration of the Festival of the Holy Maries (La Fête des Saintes Maries) every May.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene, who is also identified as the Mary who is the sister of Martha and Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead) of Bethany, as well as the woman taken in adultery (Luke 7:37) and thus in need of penitence, wandered from the landing spot eastward to the forest of the cave (la forêt de la Baume). Once in the forest, some angels took her to a cave/grotto on a hillside. Here, covered only by her long hair, with a psalm book and crucifix, she lived the next 33 years (symbolic of the 33 years of Jesus's life). She survived on a diet of roots and berries. Occasionally, she was visited with visions of the Virgin Mary.

As she approached her death, she was transported by angels to the oratory of Saint Maximin, the church founded by Saint Maximin, the first bishop of Aix-en-Provence and one of the people who fled to France from the Holy Land. In 1279, a sarcophagus with the reputed relics of Mary Magdalene (by this time considered a saint within the church), was found, and a short time later, a large basilica was constructed (1295–1296), together with the adjacent Dominican convent.

Since the 14th century, pilgrims have flocked to the church to view the relics, and today, a reliquary with Mary Magdalene's skull may be venerated in the basilica's crypt. They will also visit the cave where she lived for so many years. The largest number of visitors will arrive at the church and cave on July 22, the anniversary of Mary Magdalene's feast day.

Over the years, pilgrims have included a number of young couples who sought the saint's help in building a united marriage and young women seeking a mate.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holy Maries, Festival of the (La Fête des Saintes Maries); Mary Magdalene, Day of the Holy.

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Magha Puja Day

Magha Puja Day (or Sangha Day) is a Southeast Asian Buddhist celebration that recalls an occasion during the earthly life of Gautama Buddha. During the first year after he had received his enlightenment and following the lengthy retreat during the rainy season that had been held at Sarnath, the Buddha traveled to Rajagaha, the capital of the ancient Indian state of Magadha city. The mountain that rises above Rajagaha, known as Vulture Peak, would often be chosen by the Buddha as a spot from which to deliver his discourses, and the king gave the Buddha a park, the Bamboo Grove, as a place where his monks could stay. As many as 1,250 monks along with two of his principal disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, visited him at the monastery in the Bamboo Grove. The Buddha took this occasion to deliver his discourse on the Vinaya (i.e., the rules governing the monastic order). Magha Puja Day is now celebrated on the full moon of the third lunar month on the Buddhist lunar calendar (late February or early March on the Common Era calendar).

On the day in question, the monks, all ordained by the Buddha, listened to a discourse in which he summarized his teachings around three principles—to do good, to abstain from evil actions, and to purify one's mind. While the year is unknown, it was said to have been delivered in the third lunar month under the full moon.

It is also unclear as to the manner in which Buddhists commemorated this event over the years. What is known is that a new celebration of it began in the 19th century under the Siamese king Rama IV (1804–1868) and expanded during the lengthy reign of his successor King Rama V (1853–1910). Rama IV ordered the celebration of the Magha Puja Ceremony at the famous Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok in 1851 and established it as an annual celebration. The image of the Emerald Buddha and its presence in Bangkok is tied directly to the emergence of the Thai royal family.

Under Rama V, the ceremony spread throughout the kingdom and to neighboring lands. On that day, believers go to a temple for various ceremonies and, in the evening, participate in a candlelit procession led by the monks under the full moon. The king of Thailand generally participates in the activities at the Emerald Buddha Temple.

Although Magha Puja Day is celebrated most extensively in Thailand, where it is a national holiday, the practice has spread throughout Southeast Asia and among Theravada communities in the West. One popular practice at Buddhist temples is the lighting of 1,200 candles in memory of those who gathered at the Bamboo Grove.

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See also Abhidhamma Day; Asalha Puja Day.

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Magha Purnima

The day of the full moon during the Indian Hindu month of Magha (January–February on the Common Era calendar) is considered, as are all full moon days, an auspicious time for religious endeavors—a bath in one of the holy rivers, the engagement in meditation, japa yoga (repetition of mantras), fasting (*upvaas*), or doing meritorious deeds. Each purnima has a distinct emphasis, however, and thus activity around it for observers varies. Guru Purnima is, for example, a time to remember one particular ancient guru, Bhagwan Ved Vyas, and also to pay homage to one's own contemporary religious teacher.

On Magha Purnima day, believers pay special homage to one's favorite deity, possibly with a visit to their temple to make an offering. For Saivite Hindus, it is a day to worship the goddess Parvati, the wife of Shiva and/or the deity Bruhaspati (or Brahmanaspati). He is also known as Deva-guru, as he is the teacher of the Devas, one set of deities in Hindu mythology. Shiva granted him this position in the hierarchy of deities.

While Magha Purnima may be observed at most any temple, its celebration is more emphasized in Tamil-speaking areas of the country (and among Tamil people now scattered around the globe), Magha Purnima is celebrated as Teppotsavam, the float festival. Its celebration is centered on the large famous Saivite Meenakshi Sundareshvarar temple at Madurai. This two-millennium-old temple is dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi (a manifestation of Parvati) and Shiva as the beautiful Lord (Sundareshvarar). On Magha Purnima, the statues of Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshvarar are taken in procession to the nearby Lake Teppakolam. Once there, the idols are seated on a small, elaborately decorated boat which then becomes the focus of worship.

Teppotsavam originated in the 17th century when the local ruler, King Thirumala Nayaga, built the lake to accompany his new palace. In the middle of the lake, he built a palace to Ganesh, the son of Parvati. His birthday was Magha Purnima (or Thai Purnima, as the full moon day of the Tamil calendar is called in Thai). He began holding the Teppotsavam festival as a means of celebrating his new palace and his birthday. Also called Thaipusam, it continues to be celebrated by Tamil communities around the world, and most elaborately in Singapore and Malaysia.

Magha Purnima also is celebrated in a noteworthy manner at the Kateel Durga Parameshwari Temple near Mangalore in Karnataka, where the goddess Durga is the center of attention. This ancient temple is located on the banks of the River Nandini and Magha Purnima is observed as the anniversary of the river's descent from the heavens.

Some women also celebrate Magha Purnima as Dattatreya Jayanti.

Constance A. Jones

See also Dattatreya Jayanti; Guru Purnima; Thaipusam; Vaitarani.

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Maghi

Maghi, a holiday for Sikhs, commemorates the martyrdom of the Chali Mukte, or Forty Immortals. The remembered incident occurred on December 29, 1705. Today, using the new Sikh Nanashahi calendar, the event is celebrated annually on January 13.

The founding of the Khalsa, the Sikh military order, by Guru Gobind Singh had alerted the Mughal (Muslim) rulers who controlled the Punjab at the time of the growing strength of the Sikhs and the correlative power of their leader. The Hindu leadership also felt threatened. The initial attempts to suppress the Khalsa were unsuccessful. Much of 1705 was spent fending off the much larger Muslim forces and found the Sikhs in what amounted to a strategic retreat. In December, Gobind Singh was visited by a group of 40 Punjabi Sikhs. During their visit, he received word of the imminent approach of a Mughal army led by Wazir Khan. The 40 decided that they could not at that moment support him and they moved away, taking a position by the side of a small body of water. As the army became visible,

however, they reassessed their situation and turned to face the oncoming force. By sunset, all 40 were dead or seriously injured, and the Mughal forces retreated. Guru Gobind Singh blessed them as *muktas*, or emancipated ones, and changed the name of the place to Muktsar in their honor.

The largest celebration of Maghi is at Muktsar, where an annual fair is held. Around the world, however, Sikhs visit their *gurdwaras* for *kirtan* (hymns), stories of the martyrs, and an end-to-end recital of the holy Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book.

Maghi is celebrated on the first day of the month of Magh in the Hindu lunar calendar. It follows on the heels of the Hindu midwinter Lohri festival when bonfires are lit in Hindu fields and yards. The next morning Hindus see as an auspicious occasion to go for a brief swim in a local river or pond.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Calendars, Religious; Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday; Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

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Mahashivaratri

On the 14th day of each month of the Hindu lunar calendar, the god Shiva (or Siva), one of the three major deities of the Hindu pantheon, is acknowledged, and the day is called Sivaratri. However, the 14th day of the Hindu month of Magha is designated as Mahashivaratri, and became a national Hindu holiday celebrated throughout India and the Indian diaspora. It is a solemn occasion in which leaves of the Bael tree, believed to have medicinal value, are offered to Lord Shiva, and people fast and engage in an all-night vigil.

Mahashivaratri recalls an old story of the Asuras (power-hungry demons) and their half-brothers, the gods. The demons had much power, but because of their lack of piety—they neglected the making of sacrifices and did not visit holy places—they did not acquire great powers within themselves. Meanwhile, the gods made sacrifices, dealt truthfully with each other, visited holy places, and thus increased in power within themselves.

Both the Gods and the Asuras knew that they could gain the Amrit, the Water of Life, if they churned up the Ocean of Milk that encircled their world. With the mountain Mandara for a churning pole and the giant serpent Vasuki for a churning rope, the gods and the Asuras churned the Ocean of Milk. As they churned, Vasuki spat venom from each of his many heads. The venom broke the rocks around the



Festival participants stay awake through the night in a vigil to honor the Hindu god Shiva. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

ocean, creating openings for the ocean to flow over creation, threatening destruction to the worlds of both gods and men.

At that point, Shiva stepped forward, gathered the venom in a cup, and drank it. His wife Parvati, fearing for his life, grabbed his throat so the poison would not enter his stomach. And the burn on his throat is still seen to this day as a dark blue marking. His action, however, saved creation and allowed the gods to gain more powers than the demons.

As the churning continued, wondrous things emerged from the primordial Milk Ocean. Surabhi, the wish-fulfilling cow, came forth. Shri, the goddess of prosperity and fortune, and Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods, came forth. Then, the Kaustubha gem that always adorns Vishnu's chest emerged. Finally, the nectar of immortality appeared, and knowing that the demons would want to seize the nectar of immortality, Vishnu took the form of the enchantress Mohini. While the demons were mesmerized with her beauty, she served the nectar to the gods alone. Thus, only the gods gained immortality, and when the demons attacked they were routed and the world was once again in the hands of the gods.

Since that time, Shiva dwells in woodland filled with flowers. He keeps near him a spear with which he will destroy the worlds at the end of an age, a bow, a battle-axe, and a trident. At one point, his wife Umā covered his eyes with her hands. As a result, the world sunk into darkness. Again to save the world, Shiva

developed a third eye on his forehead. When he opened that eye, the light returned to the world. But Shiva's throat remains blue from the venom that he drank.

Mahashivaratri is unique as the major Hindu celebration not accompanied by revelry and gaiety. It is rather a solemn event that emphasizes restraint and vows of forgiveness, truth telling, and noninjury to others that must be kept for the full 24 hours. Fasting and staying awake to worship Shiva during the entire night fill the hours of observance. One is to recite the mantra of Shiva, *om namah shivaya*, and prayers for forgiveness during the evening vigil. If the rites are performed faithfully, one is rewarded with worldly success and the heavenly realm of Shiva.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ashokashtami; Chaitra Purnima; Navaratri.

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Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday

Mahasthamaprapta (Bodhisattva Great Power, known in Japan as Seishi Bosatsu) is a Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva best known within the Pure Land Buddhist tradition as a close associate of Amitabha and the Western Paradise. She is most often depicted sitting or standing beside Amitabha, along with Avalokitesvara (Guan Yin). This popular group is known as the Three Saints of the Western Paradise. Mahasthamaprapta's halo of wisdom permeates all creation. She is often seen in feminine form, and recognized by the water pitcher on her crown and the lotus bud in her hand. The lotus bud is meant to be used to guide the elect to the Pure Land.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, he is pictured as praising Amitabha. He notes that in the remote past, he was taught by a Buddha associated with Amitabha, called the called the Buddha Whose Light Surpassed that of the Sun and Moon, to call upon the name of Amitabha, which led to realizing Samadhi (the meditative state in which the mind is totally concentrated and achieves complete bliss). He ends his brief discourse by declaring that he will "help all living beings of this world to control their thoughts by repeating the Buddha's name so that they can reach the Pure Land. As Buddha now asks about the best means of perfection, I hold that nothing can surpass the perfect control of the six senses with continuous pure thoughts in order to realize Samadhi."

Mahasthamaprapta's birthday is celebrated on the 13th day of the seventh month in the Chinese lunar calendar, just two days before the Ullam-bana Festival. In Japan, it is held on July 13. Japanese Pure Land practitioners make note of the fact that Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of the larger Pure Land group, had a vision of Mahasthamaprapta whom he identified with Honen (1133–1212), the founder of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan and Shinran's teacher.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Ksitigarbha's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday; Samantabhadra's Birthday, Shinran Shonin, Birthday of; Ullam-bana.

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Mahavir Jayanti

Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, is generally seen as living between 599 and 527 BCE, while the Jain scriptures place his birth as having occurred on the 13th day of the waning moon of the Hindu month of Chaitra (March–April of the Common Era calendar). Mahavira was the son of Siddhartha of the Jnatri clan and Trishala, the sister of the local king. They named him Vardhamana, or "He who brings prosperity."

The two main Jain groups disagree on details of his life. They agree that his parents were followers of the earlier Jain Tirthankara Parshvanatha and that Mahavira had an aversion to worldly matters from an early age. The Shvetambaras and Digambaras, however, disagree about his pre-renunciation life. The Shvetambaras believe he married a princess called Yashoda and fathered a daughter called Priyadarshana. The Digambaras believe that Mahavira never married.

When Mahavira was 30 years of age, he renounced the world. The Digambaras suggest that he removed all his clothes, pulled out all his hair in five bunches, and became a naked ascetic. The Shvetambaras largely agree, but suggest that he kept on his small loincloth, which he wore until it fell from him. He then lived as a



Jain devotees watch a dancer as they celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Lord Mahavira in Allahabad, India. (AP/Wide World Photos)

naked or “sky clad” mendicant. He began a life of wandering, often fasting and ignoring bodily pains or pleasures. Digambaras believe he observed a vow of silence for 12 years. The Shvetambaras believe that the ascetic Makkhali Gosala asked to become his disciple. They were companions for a while but eventually parted ways on less than cordial terms.

After 12 years of austerities, Mahavira attained complete enlightenment and became the 24th and final Tirthankara (saint) of this era. Though he made no effort to create it, the Jain community began to form around him. He lived another 30 years and traveled widely throughout India. He then entered the afterlife, where he exists now as an arihant in a state of unlimited consciousness and eternal bliss.

Mahavir Jayanti commemorates the birth, and on this day Jains gather together to focus upon him and his message. This commemoration also falls in the midst of the observance of Navpad Oli and its time of meditation upon the spectrum of Jain leadership, Mahavira being an arihant of the first order. Thus while keeping the fast and meditational intent of Navpad Oli, the story of Mahavira is added. The statue in the temple of Mahavira will be ceremonially bathed (abhishek) and if a moveable statue is present, it will be rocked in a cradle. In many places, especially in India, the statue may also be processed through the streets of the community around the temple. In some states in India, such as Gujarat, where Jains are especially concentrated, this day is a public holiday. Many people will travel to the Jain sacred sites in Gujarat on this day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Maiden Voyage Anniversary (June 6)

Scientology is a religion that shares its teachings with members in progressive stages as they master more introductory and intermediate levels of beliefs and practices. The very highest levels of instruction (called OT VIII) are presented to the more advanced members aboard a luxury liner owned by the church and docked in the Caribbean nation of Curaçao. The maiden voyage of that ship, the *Freewinds*, began and the release of the materials for OT VIII occurred on June 6, 1988. The OT (or Operating Thetan) levels represent the highest teachings of Scientology.

Scientology is organized as a Western Esoteric religion. It teaches that humans are essentially not their body or mind, but their spirit (the Thetan), which has been trapped in the body due to its forgetfulness of its true nature. Scientology teaches people about the true nature of the self—body, mind, and spirit—and offers instructions on how to return the mind to full functionality, how the spirit may be freed from the many aberrations (called *engrams*) that it has accumulated over the eons of multiple embodiments, and how the Thetan may be freed to develop its full potential. The early stages of Scientology attempt to rid the individual of the effects of the reactive mind (which acts without consciousness or thinking), and the early OT levels focus upon ridding the self of accumulated engrams. OT VIII is the first level to concentrate on developing the individual Thetan's positive abilities (as opposed to simply removing obstacles to development). Instructions for OT VIII (the first of a set of OT levels yet to be released) are currently offered only on the *Freewinds*.

One must have finished the work for OT VII before proceeding to OT VIII, and only those who have finished OT VIII may deliver the materials to the new students of that level. These individuals form the elite and dedicated core of Church of Scientology members. Only they are invited aboard the *Freewinds*, and only on the *Freewinds* are OT VIII and the related courses offered. Annually, graduates of the OT VIII courses gather in Curaçao for a four-day event to celebrate the first voyage of the *Freewinds*, the release of OT VIII, and to hear about and discuss at

the highest levels the international development and future of the Church of Scientology and its outreach into the world.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Makar Sankranti (January 14)

Makar Sankranti is a festival held across India, under a variety of names, to honor the god of the sun, Surya. Though often relegated to a secondary position relative to the three prominent Hindu deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—Surya was a key figure in the ancient Hindu texts, the Vedas, and is the subject of one of the most repeated texts of Hindu liturgy, the Gayatri Mantra. Many devout Hindus chant this mantra daily as part of their morning rituals.

Makar Sankranti also heralds the end of winter and the arrival of spring throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Through the next six months, called the Uttarayana period, the days will become longer and warmer, and the whole period is considered an auspicious time. The day is also tied to the just-celebrated Bhishma Astami, which remembered the death of the hero Bhishma from the ancient Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, who chose to die just as the Uttarayana period began.

Makar Sankranti is observed in the month of Magha as the sun enters Capricorn (on or near January 14 on the Common Era calendar). Being a solar date, it will vary from year to year on the Hindu lunar calendar. It is also celebrated as Uttarayana Punyakalam, Pongal (in Tamil Nadu), and Pedda Panduga (in Andhra Pradesh).

A variety of stories are told of Surya, which have implications for observance of this day(s). The sun god, for example, had a number of children, among them the Lord Shani, one the nine primary celestial beings in Hindu astrology; Shani is identified with planet Saturn. When Shanti was born, it is said, an eclipse of the sun occurred. It is also said that Surya and Shani have their differences, but always on Makar Sankranti, Surya visits with Shanti—thus should fathers visit with their sons. Food, especially sweets, will be prepared using *til* (sesame seed oil), which is valued for its stickiness or binding quality. Thus, the sweets that people will give those close to them are a symbol of being bound together, whatever differences might arise.

Makar Sankranti is also fraught with implications for the early phases of the agricultural cycle. It is a time to pray for a prosperous growing season and a good future harvest, and a time to bathe one's cows, so essential to all aspects of agricultural production. It is a time to remember ancestors and, in the evenings, to celebrate around bonfires.



Hindu women draw patterns on the ground using rice flour as a form of prayer during Makar Sankranti. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

The largest gathering for Makar Sankranti is on Sager Island in West Bengal at the point the Hooghly River, a branch of the Ganges as it spreads out approaching the Indian Ocean and meets the Bay of Bengal. Each January, several hundred thousand pilgrims gather on the island for the beginning of spring. Makar Sankranti occurs in the middle of the lengthy Kumbha Mela and Magh Mela celebrations and is a high point within them.

Kite flying has become a popular activity in India, and for the more secular-minded, it has become the dominant aspect of this day. The city of Delhi holds an annual Kite Flying Day festival on January 14, and the celebration has spread across the country.

Constance A. Jones

See also Kumbha Mela; Surya Shashti.

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Mani, Commemoration of the Prophet (April 25)

The prophet Mani (c. 216–276 CE) was the founder of a religious movement named for him, Manichaeism, a post-Gnostic dualist faith. Manichaeism reached its greatest expansion around the seventh century, by which time followers could be found from the Mediterranean basin to China. Today, the major Manichaean community is the Mandeans of Iraq (and its diaspora).

Mani offered a vision of a world engaged in a cosmic struggle between good and evil, a spiritual world of light, and a material world of darkness. Humans may identify with either, through an ongoing process that takes place in human history; light is gradually removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light from which it came. Mani shared a belief with the Gnostics that the human soul lives as an exile captive, trapped in matter, and that its real home is with the supreme Entity (God), to which it will eventually return.

Contemporary Gnostics, such as those associated with the Ecclesia Gnostica, revere Mani as a major figure in the Western Gnostic tradition. It has assigned April 25 as a day to remember him and commemorate his birth. The worship that day includes a prayer to him, and readings from Manichean writings.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical Year; Valentinus, Feast of the Holy.

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Manjushri's Birthday

Manjushri (in Japan as Monju-bosatsu) is pictured in the Buddhist sutras (holy books) as the leader of the bodhisattvas. Regarded as a symbol of the perfection of wisdom, he is often pictured, along with Samantabhadhara, in attendance upon Gautama Buddha—most notably in the Flower Garland (Adornment) Sutra. He is generally pictured riding a lion and holding a sword symbolic of the sharpness of his discrimination.

Manjushri is said to manifest himself on Mount Wutai, in China's Shanxi Province. Stories tell of the visit of an Indian monk in the first century CE who reported a vision of the bodhisattva. Wutai Mountain and the Wisdom Buddha Manjushri are also the subjects of various Buddhist scriptures, sutras, and tantras. Mahayana Buddhism began arriving on Wutai Mountain quite early in its transmission to



Statue of Manjushri, the Buddhist leader of the bodhisattvas. (J. Gordon Melton)

China, and the first temple was constructed during the reign of Emperor Ming Di (r. 58–75 CE). Literally hundreds of monasteries were built over the next centuries. The associations of the mountain with Manjushri were significantly strengthened in the eighth century with the visit of arrival Padmasambhava, who was spreading Vajrayana Buddhism through nearby Tibet. Manjushri is especially dear to Vajrayana Buddhists. Then in the 12th century, the Mongolians of the Yuan dynasty, as part of their kingdom building, intruded into Tibet and left the Dalai Lama in charge of the country. As the development of Vajrayana

Buddhism was encouraged, the Gelugpa school became established at Mount Wutai. The various Buddhist temples that remain on Mount Wutai hold two major celebrations. The first, the Assembly of the Sixth Month, is a time for pilgrims to visit. The second and more important occurs over four days in the fourth month. It focuses on rituals held in 10 of the mountain's largest temples. This ritual cycle marks Manjushri's birthday on the fourth day of the fourth lunar month.

In Japan, celebrations to honor Manjushri can be traced back to the ninth century CE. His veneration is still practiced in Japan and draws on stories of Manjushri appearing in the guise of beggars. Believers prepare food and drink on this day to feed all beggars. Meanwhile, in the temples, the names of Manjushri and the Medicine Buddha were recited 100 times each, each day. Today this ritual survives in only two temples. Manjushri is one of the characters in the Medicine Buddha Sutra.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Ksitigarbha's Birthday; Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday; Samantabhadhara's Birthday.

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Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras, also known as Carnival, is the name given to the celebrations that precede the beginning of the Lenten fast in Roman Catholic countries. Lent, the 40-day period of preparation leading to the celebration of Easter, originated in the wake of the church's rise to a place of dominance in the Roman Empire. With the shift of secular power to Constantinople, the church in Rome arose as the strongest international organization in the West. Through the medieval period, as the population accepted Christianity and the communal practice of the Christian year became pervasive, the weeks between Epiphany (January 6) and the beginning of the Lenten season, usually in February, became a time to remove those food items from the home that were banned during the fast—especially meat and related products such as butter, milk, and eggs. The actual week prior to Lent became a time to indulge in the forbidden items—including alcohol and sex. The turning of such indulgence into the occasion for a community celebration also resonated with prior spring celebrations in pre-Christian European cultures, but came to focus on the day prior to Ash Wednesday, which became known as Fat Tuesday (or Mardi Gras) and Carnival (from a Latin word meaning to take away meat).

Mardi Gras is thus not so much a religious celebration as an irreligious celebration that immediately precedes a lengthy period of somber religious observance. The excess that began to mark Mardi Gras was related to the seriousness with which the Lenten season was practiced. European celebrations spread from Rome to communities across southern Europe. In Roman Catholic countries, Fat Tuesday is also known as Shrove Tuesday, a reference to the requirement that Roman Catholics should make formal confession to a priest immediately before Lent begins. The most famous European Carnival evolved in Venice, but many local celebrations also emerged across Europe, especially in France, Spain, Portugal, and England. Most of these celebrations did not survive in those countries that came to be dominated by Protestantism, the celebrations in Denmark being a notable exception. Pastries became a popular indulgence in northern Europe at this time.

Mardi Gras/Carnival was transferred from Europe to the Americas by the French (to New Orleans) and the Portuguese (to Brazil). When Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville (1680–1767), landed on the Gulf Coast of Louisiana in 1699, he named the spot, “Pointe du Mardi Gras.” Three years later, he established Fort Louis de la Louisiane, at what is now Mobile, Alabama. The first Mardi Gras

was actually celebrated in Mobile in 1703. New Orleans was established in 1718, and by the 1730s, records show that Mardi Gras was being regularly celebrated but in a much more subdued manner, relative to what it would become. The first parades were recorded in the 1830s, and the event had grown to the point that a list of festive activities was announced in the newspapers. Floats constructed in France were imported for the Fat Tuesday parade. It became a legal holiday in Louisiana in 1872, and from that time grew steadily into an elaborate communal party that faced a major setback only by the flood following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (which fortunately did not reach the old French Quarter, where much of the Mardi Gras celebration has been centered).

Today, the most famous Mardi Gras/Carnival celebrations are staged in Venice, Rio de Janeiro, and New Orleans, but smaller ones are also held in other Gulf communities such as Galveston, Texas; Biloxi, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola, Florida. In the last half of the 20th century, numerous Mardi Gras celebrations have appeared as part of the tourist economy in many cities, large and small, across the United States. In Miami, Florida, the Majic City Carnival is sponsored by the Church of the Incarnation (Episcopal), one of a miniscule number of celebrations that have any religious base. Polish Americans, most of whom are Catholic, in the northern urban centers of Chicago and Detroit celebrate Mardi Gras on Fat Thursday (the Thursday before Ash Wednesday) as *Pączki Day*, named for the doughnut-like pastry that is consumed amid the music and parties. Pancakes and rich pastries are a ubiquitous element of the Mardi Gras season across North America and Europe.

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See also Easter; Epiphany; Lent.

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Margaret of Scotland, Saint's Day of St. (June 10)

Saint Margaret (c. 1045–1093) was the daughter of a Scottish exile living in Hungary and a distant relative of Saint Stephen, the Hungarian ruler. Her father returned in 1057 and was warmly received by Malcolm III (d. 1093), who would eventually make Margaret his wife. Margaret has become quite religious and used

her influence as queen to help reform the Scottish church. She had several churches built, including the Abbey at Dunfermline, constructed primarily to house an important relic she had acquired, a piece of the True Cross. She predicted the day of her death, November 16, 1093, shortly after that of her husband.

Her body was entombed at Dunfermline. Following her canonization in 1250, a shrine was constructed and her relics reburied. As the Protestant Reformation moved through Scotland, and the Catholic churches voided of their relics, Mary Queen of Scots, a staunch Catholic, gained possession of Margaret's skull, which was later transported to France and lost during the French Revolution. The rest of the remains were shipped to King Philip II (1556–1598) of Spain. In the 19th century, the Catholic bishop James Gilles of Edinburgh (r. 1838–1863) asked Spain for the return of Margaret's relics, but no one could locate them.

Margaret's Day was for many years celebrated on June 10, but in 1969, it was moved to November 16, the anniversary of her death. She has been named one of the patron saints of Scotland. Her saintliness is also celebrated by the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Bishop Gilles founded a convent named in her honor.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Saint Stephen's Day (Hungary); Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.

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Martin de Porres, Saint's Day of St. (November 3)

Martin de Porres, among the first Africans in the New World to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, was born in Lima, Peru, in 1579, the illegitimate son of a Spanish knight and a black free-woman. Martin was raised in poverty. As a youth, he learned to cut hair and assist a physician in the then-common practice of bleeding patients.

In his 15th year, he became associated with the Dominicans and eventually became a professed lay brother. He tended the sick in the monastery infirmary and assumed responsibility for the daily distribution of food to the needy. During these years, he became acquainted with the Dominican nun Rose of Lima. Martin became known of his humility, and was constantly reminded of his illegitimate birth.

Martin became known for his prayer life, and his fellow monks reported on instances in which he was seen to levitate and stories abounded of his passing

unhindered through locked doors and bi-locating to assist a ill person. Gradually, people began to seek him out for spiritual counseling. He was ill through most of 1639, at times in some degree of pain, alleviated by a variety of vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary and several saints and angels. He died on November 3, 1639. The priests who knew him praised his saintliness, and he was deemed worthy to have a final resting place among the priests of the order. Knowledge of the miraculous events throughout his life was widespread. It was reported that so many people who came to view his body prior to his burial took pieces of his robe as a relic that his body had to be redressed three times before the burial.

Numerous letters were sent to Rome asking for his beatification, but the process moved very slowly. In 1763, Pope Clement XIII (r. 1758–1769) issued a decree affirming the heroism of his virtues. In 1937, Pope Gregory XII (r. 1831–1846) beatified him, but not until 1962 did Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963) oversee his canonization. The Episcopal Church in the United States honors Martin (along with Rose de Lima and Toribio de Mogrovejo, a contemporary of Martin who was bishop of Lima) with a feast day on August 23. Lutherans honor him on November 3.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.; Dominic, Saint's Day of St.; Peter Claver, Saint's Day of St.; Rose of Lima, Saint's Day of St.

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Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday of (January 15)

Martin Luther King, Jr., Baptist minister and leader of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, was born Michael King in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929. His father was a prominent African American minister and pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. In 1933, the elder King had both his name and his son's name changed to Martin Luther King.

The younger King attended Morehouse College, where he experienced a call to the ministry, and after his college years enrolled at Crozier Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he initially became aware of the nonviolent philosophy of the recently martyred Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948).

He completed his graduate studies at Boston University (PhD, 1955). While there, he married Coretta Scott (b. 1927). They settled in Montgomery, Alabama, where he had become the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Before the year was out, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white patron of the local bus system. Following her conviction for breaking the local laws segregating the races, a boycott of the city buses by African Americans ensued, and King was selected to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association, an organization formed to guide the boycott. The boycott's success led to the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC). In 1959, King visited India and, upon his return, resigned from his pastorate, moved to Atlanta, and devoted most of his time to SCLC.

In the early 1960s, the focus of the civil rights movement turned to Birmingham, Alabama, where King was arrested during demonstrations aimed at desegregating the city. While in jail, he wrote one of his most memorable pieces, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," explaining his actions. He followed by leading the 1963 march on Washington in support of new civil rights legislation, during which he gave his oft-quoted "I Have a Dream" speech. In 1964, he was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year and received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ultimately, the passing of national civil rights legislation presented King with decisions about broadening the movement to include northern urban centers and about applying the nonviolent philosophy to the growing war in Vietnam. He also decided to throw his support behind poverty concerns and selected Memphis, Tennessee, where a strike of garbage workers was ongoing. In Memphis, on April 4, 1968, King was assassinated while standing on the balcony of his motel.

King emerged in the years after his death as both an international Christian figure inspiring a scope of efforts to liberate the poor, oppressed, and outcast of the world, and a controversial figure among many white people in the United States. After much debate, on November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill that established the federal holiday honoring King. It would initially be celebrated on January 20, 1986, the Monday following his birthday. In 1992, President George H. W. Bush proclaimed Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday to be observed on the third Monday of January each year. Several states resisted accepting the proclamation, and it would be 2000 before it became officially commemorated in all 50 states.

Most Protestant churches do not have a mechanism for establishing a new holiday, and have chosen to join in the various local public celebrations rather than organize competing events. The liturgical churches, especially the Lutherans and Anglicans, were also in a quandary as whether to celebrate King's life on January 15 or April 4, the day of his death, it being usual to commemorate saints on their death day. Lutherans have tended to favor January 15, especially as the civil holiday is rarely on that date. Episcopalians and Methodists have tended to favor April 4.

In 1993, the U.S. government created the Corporation for National and Community Service to coordinate a number of agencies that nurture volunteer action

and community services. In 1994, Congress supplemented the legislation creating the new corporation by passing the King Holiday and Service Act that mandated establishing Martin Luther King Day as a day of service. Subsequently, the corporation has pursued efforts of mobilizing volunteers to give a day to their community on Martin Luther King Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.; Martin de Porres, Saint's Day of St.; Martinmas; Race Unity Day.

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Martinmas (November 11)

Martinmas, the feast day within the Roman Catholic Church for Saint Martin of Tours (c. 316–397) honors the life of the fourth-century pioneer of monasticism. Martin was born in what is now Hungary and raised in a Pagan home. His family later moved to Italy, where at the age of 15 he was drafted into the Roman army. Though he had had some brushes with Christianity during his teen years, his conversion followed a vision of Christ he had in 337. He had encountered a beggar who was suffering from the cold, and he tore his own cloak into two pieces to share with the man. In the vision, Christ wore the cloak he had given away. He completed his time in the army, returned to Italy, and joined a monastic community.

His quiet life in Milan would be altered when he met Hillary of Poitiers (315–368), another convert from Paganism who around 350 was named bishop of Poitiers (France). Hillary became a bishop while the controversy concerning the teachings of Arius, who denied the doctrine of the trinity, still raged. Amid the back-and-forth of controversy, Hillary aligned with the position of Athanasius against Arius. As a result, he was exiled from Poitiers to the Eastern Mediterranean in 356. The exile allowed him time to master the debate and write a classical defense of the Trinity. He returned to his diocese in 360.

Shortly after his return, Hillary invited Martin to France to assist in the founding of a monastic community at Ligugé, the first in France. He proved a popular leader of the community and in 371 was named bishop of Tours. He resided in

the cathedral for a few years and then moved back to his monastic community. When he died more than a quarter of a century later, his tomb became a popular pilgrimage site and generated numerous reports of miracles. In the years before Advent had been firmly set on the church calendar, his feast day was used to mark the beginning of a 40-day period of preparation for the Christmas celebration.

As an early saint in the West, a variety of practices grew up around Martin's person, and he became associated with healings. His reputation grew when Clovis (c. 466–511), the first real king of modern France, attributed his rise to power to Martin. Clovis's successors promoted the veneration of Martin, and his tomb became a site for pilgrims traveling through Europe on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

The medieval church built over the place of Martin's burial was demolished in the wake of the French Revolution, and two streets routed over the site in an attempt to obliterate it. Interest in him, however, revived in the last half of the 19th century, and was tied to the new devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A new basilica was consecrated in 1925. Modern veneration of Saint Martin had spread throughout the Catholic Church and many local churches are named for him.

Martin of Tours is a French saint, and has been named a patron saint of the country, but is also popular in neighboring Germany, where Martinmas is widely celebrated. German Catholics emphasize Martin's role as a friend of children and patron of the poor. In Dusseldorf, Saint Martin's Eve is a time for a lantern-lit procession centered on the children while the next day is featured a large meal with roast goose as the main entree. It is also appropriate to invite the poor to share in the feast. As Catholics celebrate Martin of Tours, so Protestants may celebrate Martin Luther, who was born on November 10, Saint Martin's Eve. Commemorations of Luther were somewhat stunted after World War II, as many of the sites associated with him, such as his birthplace at Eisleben, were located in Communist East Germany. On Saint Martin's before the war, for example, children would process to the cathedral at Erfurt, where Luther attend the university, and with lighted lanterns form the pattern of a rose, the symbol on the Luther family coat of arms.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St.; Calendars, Religious; Dominic, Saint's Day of St.

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Martyrdom of Guru Arjan

Toward the end of spring each year, Sikhs commemorate the martyrdom of their fifth leader Guru Arjan Dev Ji (1563–1606), which occurred on the fourth day of the light half of the month of Jyaishta on the Hindu lunar calendar (May 30, 1606 CE). Today, using the new Sikh Nanashahi calendar, the event is celebrated annually on June 16.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji was born on April 15, 1563, as the youngest of the three sons of the Guru Ram Das Ji (1534–1581). He became the new guru following his father's death, though still a teenager. Among the accomplishments for which he is remembered is initiating the compilation of the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. Though he was not an aggressive proselytizer, the Sikh community grew during his tenure in office, many attended upon him at Govindwal, then the center of the Sikh movement.

All was well for the Sikh movement until 1605, when the Mughal emperor Akbar died. His son and successor Jahangir was a fervent Muslim with a vision of turning his land into an Islamic state, which would necessarily include converting the Sikhs. He opened himself to a variety of accusations against Guru Arjan Dev, most significantly to those of Diwan Chandu Shah (whose marriage proposal of the guru's daughter had been refused by Guru Arjun Dev). Arun Dev may have sealed his fate when he showed some kindness to Jahangir's rival Khusrav, who ruled Punjab at the time. In any case, in May, Jahangir ordered Guru Arjan Dev's arrest and transport to Lahore. His possessions were also confiscated. Once in Lahore, he was subject to severe torture for six days, but refused the emperor's demands. On the last day, he died in the river where he had been taken for a bath.

The martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev is credited with changing the basic character of Sikhism from a passive, peaceable people into a militant group willing to fight for its own survival and to protect its members from persecution. Arjun Dev was succeeded by Guru Har Gobind (r. 1606–1644). He rejected the pacifism and non-violent stance of previous gurus and organized a small army. He argued that it was necessary to take up the sword in order to protect the weak and the oppressed.

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See also Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday; Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

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Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675), the ninth guru of Sikhism, assumed his office on March 20, 1665. He succeeded to the task from his grandnephew, Guru Har Krishan (1656–1664), who had been only five years old when he became the guru and died before his eighth birthday.

Guru Har Krishan did not name a successor, only an ambiguous message that he would be found in Bakala. Several proclaimed themselves the new guru, but eventually, the unassuming Tegh Bahadur was singled out and received the support of the community.

He was named guru during the reign of the emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707), who had a goal of turning India into a Muslim land. He initiated a program of forced conversion in Kashmir. A group of religious leaders agreed, on the advice of the guru, to tell the Mughal authorities that they would willingly embrace Islam if Guru Tegh Bahadur did the same. Aurangzeb ordered his arrest and before leaving for Delhi, Tegh Bahadur selected his son, Gobind (later Guru Gobind Singh) as his successor, should it be necessary. He was arrested, detained for three months, and then sent on to Delhi in November 1675. He refused to recant his faith under torture, and was eventually beheaded on November 11, 1675. The Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib in Delhi was later built over the spot where the execution took place.

The Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur is now celebrated on Maghar 11 on the Nanakshahi calendar, which was accepted by the administrative authorities of the religion in Amritsar in the 1990. Maghar 11 is equivalent to November 24 on the Common Era calendar. Commemoration of Guru Tegh Bahadur's death is 1 of 12 "Gurpurbs," holidays that recall the birth or death of 1 of the 10 Sikh gurus. Sikhs celebrate the Gurpurbs by performing an *Akhand Path*, a public reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scriptures, in gurdwaras (Sikh worship center) around the world. It requires two days to read the entire volume from beginning to end. The reading will thus begin two days before the designated holy day and will end early in the morning of the day of commemoration. Each person chosen to participate will read aloud for two to three hours. The day itself will start early in the morning and include the recitation of prayers, the singing of *kirtans* (holy songs), and speeches on the theme of the day. It will include a communal meal.

Though he was a guru for less than two years, Tegh Bahadur made a significant impact on the movement as a result of his faithfulness under the most severe of circumstances.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday; Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Arjan.

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Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin (Roman Catholic Church)

Within the Roman Catholic Church, there are several well-recognized liturgical cycles. The two most prominent are a set of fixed holidays surrounding Christmas that begin with Advent and include Epiphany and the Feast of the Annunciation. The second includes a set of movable holidays that surround Easter, beginning with Ash Wednesday and Lent, and including the celebrations of Jesus's Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. Filling out the year are a set of saint's days. Above the major saints known to most church members, there are multiple saints assigned their day, and remembered only locally, for every day of the year, not a major holiday or feast day. With the growth of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the church, however, what amounts to a fourth liturgical cycle has emerged around the celebration of the several key dates related to the Virgin in the first two cycles, especially the Feast of the Annunciation and Christmas.

Mary appears in the Christian New Testament only in relation to events in the life of Jesus—beginning with Mary's being informed of her pregnancy even though not married. She subsequently is pictured as giving birth, raising, and being present at the death and resurrection of her son. At the crucifixion, Jesus commends her to the care of his disciple John, but she does not appear as a character of interest in the book of Acts (or writings of Paul) in the post-Pentecost church. In the second and third centuries, some interest is shown in her life both before the birth and after the death of Jesus, and several apocryphal works that circulated in the church attempted to fill out her life. Of these, the second-century *Protoevangelium of James* (a.k.a. *The Nativity of Mary*) is the most important and offers information on the parentage and early life of Mary. It names her parents, Anne and Joachim, and is the sole source of information upon which a set of Marian celebrations would be built.

Crucial to the development of Marian devotion was the definition of Mary as *Theotokos* (Mother or Bearer of God) at the Council of Ephesus in 431. While this affirmation was made as a further statement related to Jesus's status as both human and divine, it supplied the base from which some independent speculation on Mary could build. In both the East and West, as part of the development of attention given to the saints, dates for giving attention to Mary began to appear on the church calendar, beginning with those events mentioned in the New Testament that occurred before Jesus's birth, the Annunciation, by the angel that Mary was



Statue of the Virgin Mary in Hong Kong. (J. Gordon Melton)

to bear Jesus and her visitation to Elizabeth at which she is greeted with some of the most oft-quoted of biblical verses relative to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42). Once the date of Christmas was set, it was reasoned that Mary would have become pregnant with Jesus nine months earlier, thus the feast of the Annunciation was set on March 25. The feast of the visitation would be set on May 31.

As interest in Mary as the most important of the saints grew, church leaders turned to the *Protoevangelium of James*, which functioned like a host of hagiographical accounts of the apostles and the martyrs of the second and third centuries, and used to build a biography of Mary. She was born to Anne and Joachim, each of whom attained some status as saints, was presented in the temple at the age of three, and subsequently engaged to Joseph. Various traditions developed about the end of Mary’s early life, the majority favoring her death in Jerusalem and burial in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed (John 18). Western Christians began to differ from the tradition held in the east and suggested that Mary was, like the prophet Elijah, taken bodily into heaven without experiencing death.

Relatively early feasts celebrating the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8), her Presentation in the Temple (November 21), and her death (August 15) were set in the Eastern Church. It was assumed in the Eastern Church that Mary’s soul was immediately assumed into heaven, but that her body was buried in Jerusalem.

In the West, additional speculation on the birth of Mary would lead to a unique doctrine, that she was born without original sin, and thus experienced what became known as the Immaculate Conception. It was further suggested that she had not faced bodily death. Thus, while both East and West celebrate the assumption of the Virgin, they disagree on the content of that belief. In the East, it applied only to Mary's soul, while in the West, it is seen as also applying to Mary's body. Following the split between the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church in the 11th century, the West was free to develop its veneration of the virgin in distinctive ways.

Very much affecting the veneration of the Virgin in the West has been a series of apparitions in which the Virgin has appeared to various saintly individuals and initiated new forms of devotion. In the 13th century, for example, she is reputed to have appeared to Dominic de Guzman (1170–1221), the founder of the Dominican order. She suggested the use of the rosary as a form of prayer, and subsequently, it was widely promoted by the growing order. Subsequent apparitions of Mary would suggest additional items, such as the wearing of scapulars of different colors, attention to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the circulation of the Miraculous Medal, all of which have become popular practices by groups within the church. With the exception of a few forms of worship that derive from apparitions of Jesus, almost all of the innovative forms of worship introduced into Catholic worship since the 13th century began with an apparition of the Blessed Virgin. The number and frequency of such apparitions has risen notably since the early 19th century.

Coincidental with an apparition of the Virgin to a young Mexican man, a picture of her appeared on his cloak and, as the virgin of Guadalupe, has now become one of the most visible images of the Virgin in the world. Throughout Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, apparitions of the virgins to young people in different countries were accepted as genuine and subsequently became the object of widespread attention and pilgrimages to such places as Lourdes, France; Fatima, Portugal; Knock, Ireland; and Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In addition, the apparitions of the virgin were supplemented by the "discovery" of various lost statues or images of the Virgin in the context of some miraculous occurrence that indicated its special status or its desire to be located in a particular place. The discovery of lost statues and their placement in a chapel or other places where believers could gather have become the focus of large pilgrimages and national shrines in many Catholic countries.

The growth of veneration of the Virgin in various guises, the founding of numerous religious orders to perpetuate devotion to her, and the naming of her in her various manifestations as patron saint of countries, cities, and occupations have all contributed to the development of the annual calendar of Marian devotion. This calendar was given added emphasis by the papal declaration of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the Assumption of the Virgin in 1950. These were simply two highlights amid a century and a half of papal activity relative to the

January	Feast of the Holy Family
January 1	Solemnity of Mary (Circumcision of the Lord)
January 6	Epiphany
January 8	Our Lady of Prompt Succor
February 2	Feast of the Purification of Mary (a.k.a. the Presentation of Jesus)
February 11	Our Lady of Lourdes
March 25	Annunciation Day
May 31	Feast of the Visitation (of Mary to Elizabeth)
June	Feast of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin
June 27	Our Lady of Perpetual Help
July 16	Our Lady of Mount Carmel
July 26	Feast Day of St. Anne (and also of St. Joachim)
August 15	Assumption of the Virgin
August 22	Queenship of Mary
September 8	Nativity of the Virgin (Immaculate Conception)
September 8–15	Festa de Serreta (Azores)
September 12	Most Holy Name of Mary
September 15	Our Lady of Sorrows
September 24	Our Lady of Walsingham (UK)
October 7	Our Lady of the Rosary
October 8	Our Lady of Good Remedy
October 12	Feast of the Virgin of the Pillar (Spain)
October 17	Romeria of Our Lady of Valme (Spain)
November 21	Presentation of Mary
December 8	Immaculate Conception
December 12	Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 25	Christmas

Virgin that included numerous papal encyclicals (open letters to the faithful reflective of the teaching role of the pope), the declaration of Marian years (the first held during 1954), and various actions of notable Marian import, such as visiting a Marian shrine. Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) was particularly notable for his emphasis on Marian devotion punctuated by his several visits to Fatima.

Pope John Paul II's obvious favoring of Marian devotion appeared to many as balancing the seeming de-emphasis on Mary by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which refused to consider Mary as a separate topic, demanding that she be considered under the broader topic of ecclesiology. That action was followed by the reorientation of several Marian feasts around their Christological import as part of the overall reform of the liturgical calendar in 1969.

As it currently stands, the annual cycle of Marian devotion has been abstracted from the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, which has remained somewhat stable since 1969. It includes the major holidays celebrated by all Catholics, such as the feasts of the Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, and Assumption, less well-known feasts celebrated by many (such as the Feast of the Presentation of Mary or the saint's day for Saint Anne), and those celebrations that beyond the Marian faithful primarily have more local or regional import, being related to apparition in a particular location.

A variety of countries celebrate the Immaculate Conception in a slightly different manner, with additional content supplied by local events. Most notable of the local variation is in Brazil, where the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a national holiday devoted to Our Lady of the Aparacita, a statue of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception now housed in the country's large national Marian shrine. In addition, Marian years were called in 1954 and 1988, and it is difficult to predict when others may be called in the future. The month of May is considered the Month of Mary, while October is set aside as a month for the rosary. Many parishes hold Saturday as a day for Marian devotions.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anne, Feast Day of St.; Assumption of the Virgin; Christmas; Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of the; Holy Family, Feast of the; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Nativity of Mary; Presentation of Mary, Feast of the; Queenship of Mary, Feast of; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Mary Magdalene, Day of the Holy (July 22)

Mary Magdalene (a woman of the city of Magdala) first appears on the scene in the Gospel of Luke where she is identified as one from whom Jesus cast out seven evil spirits and healed of her infirmities. She became a devoted disciple of Jesus and a part of his close circle, and she remained became prominent during his last

days on earth. She was present at the crucifixion and burial. She was most notably the first person to see the resurrected Christ and to report her sighting to the unbelieving apostles (Luke 24:1–10). The most detailed scene of Mary’s visitation with the resurrected Jesus is found in the Gospel of John (20:11–18). The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches considered her a saint and fixed her feast day as July 22. That commemoration was continued by the Anglican and Lutheran churches.

In the Gnostic scriptures, from the *Pistis Sophia*, one of the few Gnostic texts to survive and be known through the centuries, to the lost works rediscovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, Mary’s role as an important disciple in the early church is made more explicit. In the *Pistis Sophia*, for example, she is described as one “whose heart is raised to the kingdom of heaven more than all thy brethren.” In the Gospel of Philip, she is mentioned as one whom Jesus loved more than all the others.

In spite of the place that Mary Magdalene had in the early church, in the opinion of many, her reputation was hurt severely by Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) who identified her with the unnamed sinful woman of Luke 7:37–39. Subsequently, Mary Magdalene was identified as a woman who had committed a range of sexual sins and would later be named the patron saint of penitent women and reformed prostitutes. In the Roman Catholic Church, Saint Mary Magdalene was traditionally celebrated as a penitent.

The discovery and publication of the Gnostic scriptures at Nag Hammadi coincided with the late-20th-century feminist movement. Mary Magdalene became a powerful symbol of both Gnostics and feminists of the patriarchal structures that dominated mainstream Christianity. Even as the Catholic Church implicitly corrected the misidentification of Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner in their 1969 revision of the Calendar of Saints, by removing any reference to her as a penitent, Gnostic Christians elevated Mary Magdalene to a central role in their liturgical year. She was given particular attention by Bishop Rosamonde Miller, the founder of the Ecclesia Gnostica Mysteriorum based in Palo Alto, California. As with the parent Ecclesia Gnostica, Miller sees the feast day of Mary Magdalene as initiating a season of liturgical reflections of the feminine. Mary Magdalene is viewed as the consort of Jesus, and the one to whom Jesus revealed the fullness of his teaching (that is, Gnosticism).

Mary Magdalene’s Day has become a significant festival for contemporary Gnostics as she represents the “archetypal Feminine Principle manifested in humanity.” The Gnostics have aligned with contemporary feminism in elevating the status and role of women.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical Year; Madeleine, Fête de la.

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Marymas Fair. See Assumption of the Virgin

Mauna Agyaras

Maun Ekadashi, or Mauna Agyaras, is a Jain holy day observed on the 11th day (*ekadashi*) in the month of Magrashirsha (November–December on the Common Era calendar). It is observed as a day for fasting and meditation in an environment of complete silence (*maura*). This day has taken on significance as it is considered the appearance day or birthday of a number of the saints or Tirthankaras that constitute the lineage behind Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. Jains look to this lineage of saints as demonstrating the ideals of the Jain lifestyle.

All of the Tirthankaras are assumed to have attained the highest level of spiritual attainment and exist in the afterlife as arhants (fully enlightened masters). An arhant is assumed to be devoid of all evils. He has destroyed all his enemies, namely the internal enemies of anger, greed, ego, and deceit. The arhants are also said to possess pure knowledge and perception and infinite power, and thus to be in a passionless existence.

The object of one's contemplation on this day is the clerical leadership of the Jain community, those who have taken the path of renunciation of the world, and who exist at various levels of accomplishment. Still in this life are the sadhus, the upadhyayas, and acharyas. Already in a disembodied state are the siddhas and arhants.

Constance A. Jones

See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mahavir Jayanti; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, is the Thursday celebration of the last week of Jesus's life on earth, which began with his entrance into Jerusalem and ended with his arrest, death by crucifixion, and resurrection. On that day, Christ held a final supper, the Jewish Passover meal, with his 12 close disciples, the apostles. The event is mentioned in various passages of the New Testament and is featured as an important occurrence toward the end of each of the gospels. The supper is described in the Gospel of Mark 14:17–26:

And when it was evening he arrived with the twelve. And as they sat and were eating, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, One of you shall betray me, even he that eats with me.”

They began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, “Is it I?”

And he said unto them, “It is one of the twelve, he that dips with me in the dish. For the Son of man goes forth, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had not been born.

And as they were eating, he took bread, and when he had blessed, he brake it, and gave to them, and said, “Take ye: this is my body.”

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Verily I say unto you, I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the Mount of Olives.

From this and the similar accounts elsewhere in the Gospels, the Christian Church developed its celebration of what is termed by various denominations as the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. This rite is regularly repeated by some groups as frequently as every day or as infrequently as once a year. Most Protestant groups do it monthly, a few quarterly. For different groups, it is part of the regular weekly Sunday church service.

Different churches also think differently about the Lord's Supper. Most liturgical churches, including the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Lutheran and Anglican churches, believe in what is termed the real presence, that Christ is truly present in the bread and the wine once what is termed the words of institution are spoken. These churches have slightly different explanations of the nature of that real presence. Churches out of the Reformed tradition (Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist) believe in a real spiritual presence, which the believer perceives by faith. This position allows the sacramental element to remain, but repudiates and discards any remaining magical element in the liturgical position. Churches out of the free church position have discarded any hint of a sacrament.

They believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance to be practiced because Jesus said to keep it in remembrance of Him. In holding the Lord's Supper, they remember what Jesus did.

However, at that meal, Jesus also introduced the sacramental practice of washing feet. Foot washing was a common occurrence, given the dry climate, but was a task assigned to slaves and servants. Jesus took the common practice and transformed its significance:

Now before the feast of the passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto his Father, having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all the things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goes unto God, rose from supper, and laid his garments aside; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. So he came to Simon Peter. He said unto him, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?"

Jesus answered and said unto him, "What I do you do not now know; but you will understand hereafter."

Peter said unto him, "You will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Jesus said to him, "He that is bathed has no need to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and you are clean, but not everyone."

For he knew him that should betray him; therefore he said, "You are not all clean."

So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and sat down again, he said unto them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them."

The ritual of sharing bread and wine became a regular occurrence integrated into church life, while the washing of feet became an annual occurrence tied to the celebration of Maundy Thursday. In fact, the name Maundy Thursday derives from the Latin words that open the foot-washing rite. The practice has varied over the years. From the Reformation era to 1955, a rite of foot washing was published for Maundy Thursday as a *seratae* rite following the Eucharistic service. Since

1955, in the Catholic Church, they have occurred together. The Mass at which the pope washes the feet of a small circle of selected participants is a major event of Holy Week in Rome. A similar practice is also followed in the Eastern churches.

In the free church tradition that began with the Anabaptists, the sacramental nature of the Lord's Supper was discarded, but at the same time, in reading the scriptures, the importance assigned to foot washing was discovered. Foot washing became a third ordinance beside Baptism and the Lord's Supper and was regularly practiced as part of worship. It became a distinguishing element in the life of many Baptist groups. Other Protestants also rediscovered foot washing but did not see it as having the same sacramental nature as the Lord's Supper. They practiced it occasionally, often as part of Maundy Thursday rituals. In the contemporary church, it has been reintroduced periodically as a sign of church renewal with an emphasis on its role as a sign of humility and a means of deepening the level of communion among members.

In the Catholic tradition, after the Maundy Thursday service, all of the cloths are removed from the church altar as a sign of Christ being stripped of his clothes before he was tortured following his arrest.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Eucharistic Congresses; Good Friday; Holy Week; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Palm Sunday.

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Mauni Amavasya

Mauni Amavasya is a special day during the larger 45-day bathing season known as Magh Mela, a sacred season that many Hindus observe as a time to wash away sins and illnesses. The period takes the whole month of Magha in the Hindu lunar calendar plus two additional weeks, beginning in December and going through the middle of February. Mauni Amavasya is the new moon day in the month of Magha, usually occurring toward the end of the Magh Mela.

The word “mauni” means silence, and those who observe this day do so by keeping complete silence throughout the day. Silence is seen as an essential part

of spiritual discipline, as it offers an opportunity for introspection and initiates a dialogue with one’s inner self. Silent time allows an individual opportunity to observe how the mind works.

Among the activities that Vaishnava Hindus engage in their silence is circumambulation of the pipal tree (the same tree that the Buddhists revere as the Bodhi Tree). They believe, as related in the Brahma Puran and the Padma Purana, how Vishnu hid in the peepal, and even that he was born under this tree. The aswattha or peepal tree is also linked to Krishna, given his quote in the Bhagavad Gita, “Among trees, I am the ashvattha.” Krishna is also believed to have died under this tree.

Celebration of Mauni Amavasya is focused on the ancient city of Prayag, known today as Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, believed to be the place where Brahma made his initial sacrifice following his creation of the world. It is noteworthy as the site of the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. According to Hindu belief, the two very real rivers are also joined here by a third invisible river, the Sarasvat. Allahabad is the site of the Magh Mela every year. Every six years, the Magh Mela is transformed into the Ardh Kumbh Mela, a smaller version of the Kumbha Mela, which is held in Allahabad every 12 years. The Kumbha Mela is held four times every 12 years in four different locations, its location on any specific occasion being determined by the position of the Jupiter in the zodiac.

Constance A. Jones

See also Kumbha Mela.

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Mawlid an-Nabi

Mawlid an-Nabi is a holiday on which Muslims celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632). Muhammad was first visited by the archangel Gabriel (or Jibril) on Mount Hira near Mecca on the 17th night of Ramadan in 610 and to have begun revealing the Qur’an, the Islamic Bible, with what would become chapter (or sura) 96.

1. Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
2. Createth man from a clot.
3. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
4. Who teacheth by the pen,

5. Teacheth man that which he knew not.
6. Nay, but verily man is rebellious
7. That he thinketh himself independent!
8. Lo! unto thy Lord is the return.
9. Hast thou seen him who dissuadeth
10. A slave when he prayeth?
11. Hast thou seen if he relieth on the guidance (of Allah)
12. Or enjoineth piety?
13. Hast thou seen if he denieth (Allah's guidance) and is froward?
14. Is he then unaware that Allah seeth?
15. Nay, but if he cease not, We will seize him by the forelock -
16. The lying, sinful forelock -
17. Then let him call upon his henchmen!
18. We will call the guards of hell.
19. Nay, Obey not thou him. But prostrate thyself, and draw near (unto Allah).

Several years later, he began to reveal the teachings from the revelation, to attack the idolatry that made up the religion of the residents of Mecca (now Saudi Arabia), and call for submission to Allah, the one God. In the year 620, Muhammad experienced a mysterious visit to Jerusalem, with Gabriel riding the winged horse Buraq. From Jerusalem, he was taken into the heavens, where he met some Prophets who in previous centuries had preceded him.

Getting primarily a hostile reception for his new message in Mecca, Muhammad moved to Medina, where what would become Islam was initially organized, distinct from the local practice of both Christianity and Judaism. After a number of years of armed hostilities with Meccans, he finally returned in 629. Muhammad won over the leadership of his own clan and was able to emerge as the authority in Mecca in 630. He ended the idolatry that had been focused at the Kaaba, the main religious shrine in the city, and spent the rest of his life building the movement he founded. In the Qur'an, he is termed the seal of a lineage of prophets (33.40) that began with Adam and continued through Moses to Jesus.

He was not deified by his followers, but has served as the exemplar of the faith and the descriptions of him by those who knew him have been assembled in a collection, the Hadith, that serves as a second holy book, providing much data not touched upon in the Qur'an. While Sunni Muslims share a high view of Muhammad, the smaller Shi'a Muslim community also concluded that only someone related to the Prophet and his descendants could legitimately rule. They traced their lineage from his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali.

Muslims center their celebration of Mawlid an-Nabi on the life and teachings of Muhammad. They sing songs about him and say special prayers. They remember

the forgiveness he showed to those who were at one time bitter enemies. It is also a day to share wealth with the less fortunate.

Mawlid an-Nabi began to be celebrated in the 13th century and culminated a month of festivities. The day itself would be a time for large gatherings, gift giving, and feasting. In more recent times, celebrations have been more subdued out of a recognition that Muhammad had urged followers not to make it a matter of special focus. In fact, it was a month in which he tended to fast, not unlike the month of Ramadan. Some Muslims question the legitimacy of any celebration of Muhammad's birthday, while others completely ignore it.

James A. Beverley

See also Ashura; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary; Hajj; Id al-Adha; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Laylat al-Mir'ag; Laylat al-Qadr; Laylat ul Bara'ah; Ramadan; Urs Festival.

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Mayan Calendar

In the 1990s, an obscure calendar from ancient Meso-America gained some importance among followers of Western Esotericism. The importance of the Mayan calendar was initially proposed by art historian José Arguelles (b. 1939) in his 1987 book, *The Mayan Factor: Path beyond Technology*. The unexpected success of *The Mayan Factor* among followers of the New Age led him to put out a new calendar for their use, a 13-moon/28-day calendar focused on phases of the moon, which many New Agers had begun to follow. This calendar runs from July 26 to July 24 of the following year, a total of 364 days. July 25 is left as a "Day out of Time." He attempted to synchronize his calendar with the Mayan calendar, while drawing on other non-Mayan sources, and make it available to

modern people who otherwise live by the Common Era calendar (the modern revised Gregorian calendar used by most countries as the 21st century begins). His work was highly criticized by his scholarly colleagues, though those criticisms were usually ignored by his New Age audience. Through the several organizations he founded, the Planet Art Network and the Foundation for the Law of Time, he has continued to speculate on the calendar and its modern spiritual and metaphysical implications.

Even before Arguelles, however, speculation concerning the Mayan calendar was made by Michael D. Coe, who in his 1966 book *The Maya* offered the suggestion, in passing, that civilization might end on December 24, 2011. In later editions, he revised the date to the now-familiar December 23, 2012. The idea was discussed by Frank Waters in his *Mexico Mystique: The Coming Sixth Age of Consciousness* (1975) and again mentioned briefly by Arguelles in both *The Transformative Vision* (1975) and *The Mayan Factor* (1987), but the idea was largely forgotten in the 1990s with the New Age movement in sharp decline.

Then, after 20 years of neglect, Daniel Pinchbeck revived speculation about the Mayan calendar and the 2012 date while linking them to a wide variety of beliefs surrounding UFOs, though his best-selling 2006 book *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl* was essentially based on his own experiments with mood-altering substances and channeling. He also tempered Coe's original apocalyptic predictions and proposed a shift from materialistic to spiritual consciousness in its stead. By the time Pinchbeck's book appeared, the most popular prophetic Esoteric text of the 1990s, James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, appeared to have faded in popularity, and within a short time, a host of new books appeared discussing and offering alternative speculation about what, if anything would occur in December 2012.

While the literature on 2012 generally refers to the Mayan calendar, the Mayans actually had three calendars. Two of these calendars were called the Haab' and the Tzolk'in. The Haab' was the 365-day political calendar. It consists of eighteen 20-day divisions, plus a five-day period added at the end of the year. These last five days, having been added to being the year close to the solar year, were to some degree out of the system and viewed as unlucky and unfortunate. The Haab' started at the winter solstice and marked out the planning for an agricultural year.

The Haab' was combined with the Tzolk'in, the 260-day religious ceremonial calendar. At the beginning of the Mayan cycle, the Haab' and Tzolk'in would begin running side by side simultaneously. When the Tzolk'in ran out, it would simply begin again. It took 52 years for the Tzolk'in to once again end and begin at the winter solstice as did the Haab'. The 52-year cycle would operate for most people and most concerns, as very few lived to be more than 52 years old. The combined Haab'-Tzolk'in calendars named but did not number the years.

For the recording of events more than 52 years ago, a third calendar was employed, the so-called Long Count calendar. It is this calendar around which modern prophetic speculation has gathered. The Long Count begins counting

years from what most believe to be the Mayans' date for creation, which would be August 11, 3114 BCE in the Common Era calendar used in most countries today. The Long Count calendar runs for 5,125 years and hence will run out in 2012 and start over again.

The 2012 date has been correlated with a variety of facts. Some have suggested, for example, that in 2012, the plane of the solar system will line up exactly with the plane of the Milky Way, thus completing a wobble cycle that takes five times the 5,125 years of the Mayan calendar, or approximately 26,000 years.

Prophecies concerning 2012 vary from anticipations of catastrophe to hopes for positive social change and large-scale spiritual transformation for individuals. The expected changes vary from the visible and disruptive alternation of social and natural structures to the invisible and hence difficult-to-detect changes in human consciousness.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Common Era Calendar; Winter Solstice.

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Mazu Festival, Goddess

Mazu (a.k.a. Matzu, Tianhou) is one of the most popular goddess figures in traditional Chinese religion. According to most accounts, she was once a real historical person, born as Lin Moniang in Putian county of Fujian Province, China. She was born in 960 CE on the 23rd day of the 3rd lunar month, which happened to be the first year of the reign of Jianlong of the Song dynasty. She died at a relatively young age on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. She was only 28 years old, and she never married.

According to the legends that have built up around Lin Muniang, her conception was miraculous, her mother having been assisted by the goddess Guan Yin. Her



Statue of the goddess Mazu in China. (Peng Guang Chen/Dreamstime.com)

name Moniang, or “mute maiden,” derived from her reputation for not crying as a child. When she was 16 years old, a spirit gave her a magical charm that allowed her to exercise magical powers and to travel outside her body. She worked many miracles and defeated many demons and monsters. Many of the stories about her involve water. She saved her father who got caught in a storm with his fishing vessel. She provided safe drinking water, ended droughts, and turned back floods.

In the end, she was welcomed to the heaven by the Jade Emperor, who heads the pantheon of deities in traditional Taoism. Mazu experienced her first wave of popularity as a deity during the Song dynasty. She was among a number of new-breed deities who operated somewhat apart from the tradition Taoist hierarchy, much as bodhisattvas in Pure Land Buddhism or angels and saints in Catholicism. Through the centuries, different emperors bestowed elaborate titles on her. After conquering Taiwan, The Kangxi emperor named her empress of Heaven.

The first temple primarily dedicated to Mazu appeared to have been built in 1122 in Fujian. The first in Hong Kong arose in 1266, and worship was established in Taiwan in the 18th century. By the end of the 20th century, there were some 800 Mazu temples noted in Taiwan, and more than 100,000 people traveled annually to Putian to her traditional home. Here annually, on the day of her birth and death in April and October, there is a large festival in her honor.

Festivities may include performances of Chinese opera on stages set up in front of a temple, the movement of processions honoring the deity through the neighborhood, various types of musical performances, and a puppet show for the kids and young at heart. When an important temple has its festival, the lesser temples may send their

deity there for a visit. These images from lesser temples are believed to be empowered from passing through the incense smoke of one of the larger temples.

Besides the temple on Meizhou Island in Putian county of Fujian Province, other important pilgrimage sites for Mazu believers are the Chaotian Gong temple in Beigang, Taiwan, which has a statue of Mazu that comes from Meizhou Island; the A-Ma Temple, which is the oldest temple in Macau, constructed in 1488 to commemorate Mazu as the goddess who blesses Macau's fishermen; and the old temples in Kowloon, Wanchai, Stanley, and Joss House Bay in Hong Kong.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Double Ninth Festival; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Pak Tai, Birthday of.

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Meat Fare Sunday. See Mardi Gras

Medicine Buddha's Birthday

The Medicine Buddha (Bhaisajya-guru or in Japan, Yakushi-nyorai) is the bodhisattva most known as a healing force in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. According to Buddhist teachings, prior to attaining enlightenment, Medicine Master made 12 vows to cure all illnesses and lead all people to enlightenment. The circumstances of the making of the vows are revealed in the Medicine Master Sutra, which also speak of the benefits to be offered to believers who invoke Medicine Buddha's name.

Medicine Buddha is charged with healing all diseases in the sick as well as any deficiencies of wisdom we might have. He is often depicted with the attending bodhisattvas Sunlight (on his left) and Moonlight (on his right), who lead the cadre of bodhisattvas that surround Medicine Buddha. His body is transparent, and he is pictured as wearing a monastic robe and seated with the legs crossed. His left hand lies in his lap and usually holds the medicine bowl, while his right hand forms the charity mudra and holds either a branch with fruit, or just the fruit of the myrobalan, a medicinal plant found in India and other tropical countries. His birthday is celebrated on the 22nd day of the 8th lunar month.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Mahasthamaprapta's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday; Mudras.

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Meher Baba, Commemoration Days of (January 31, February 25)

Meher Baba is the religious name of Merwan S. Irani (1894–1969), an Indian spiritual teacher who was believed by his disciples to be the Avatar of the Age (i.e., an incarnation of God). He came to his teaching mission after studying with five teachers from several different religious traditions (each now considered a perfect master by the followers of Meher Baba). In 1921, he began to gather followers, and then in 1925, he moved into a period of silence and taught entirely without speaking. While centering his work on India, he also traveled to the West more than a dozen times. In the United States, he accepted into his following Rabia Martin, a female, who led the Sufi movement initiated by Pir Inayat Khan (1882–1927) which emerged as Sufism Reoriented. He died January 31, 1969, at Meherabad, near his birthplace at Poona, India, and left behind a loosely organized but dedicated following generally referred to as Baba Lovers. His tomb has become a shrine.

Each year, Meherabad hosts two events that specifically commemorate the life of Meher Baba. On February 25, his birth celebration begins at 5:00 a.m. at Meherabad for prayers and songs to celebrate the coming of the Avatar into the world. The festive atmosphere will continue through the day. On January 30, thousands of Baba Lovers will begin to arrive at Meherabad for a several-day commemoration of Amartithi, the remembrance of Meher Baba dropping his body (death). That day, a 48-hour program of film, songs, and dance will begin on a stage near Meher Baba's tomb. The climax of the gathering comes shortly after noon on January 31, in commemoration of Baba's earthly end at 12:15 p.m. The followers gather at the tomb shrine for 15 minutes of silence in recognition of Baba's life of teaching in silence. Those who cannot come to Meherabad will attend a similar gathering at their local center.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Osho (Rajneesh), Birthday of; Sai Baba of Shirdi, Birthday of.

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Meskal (September 27)

Meskal, the first major date of the liturgical year of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, celebrates the finding of the True Cross by Saint Helena (c. 248–c. 329), the mother of the emperor Constantine (r. 306–337). This celebration, which also occurs in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, has assumed a particular importance in the Ethiopian Church. The most elaborate celebration will occur annually in Meskal Square in the center of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

Meskal highlights the physical presence of a fragment of the True Cross that resides at the remote Gishen Mariam monastery in Egziabher Ab, some 300 miles north of Addis Ababa. The fragments of the True Cross were a gift of the Christians of Egypt, who during the Middle Ages were on occasion protected from persecution by the Muslim authorities in Egypt, by the intervention of Ethiopians. When offered gold as a thank-you gift, the Ethiopian emperor Dawit I (1362–1413) asked for some pieces of the True Cross, which at the time were in the custody of the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria. Since that time, Meskal has commemorated both the discovery of the True Cross by Helena and the transfer of pieces of it to Ethiopia.

Originally, in the fourth century, following the establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, Helena traveled to the Holy Land, where she discovered a number of objects reputed to be relics of biblical times, none more heralded than the cross upon which, it was claimed, Jesus was crucified. Frustrated at not finding the cross, she is said to have lighted incense and followed the smoke to the site where the three crosses of Jesus and the two thieves crucified with him were buried.

In a ritual reenactment of the events of finding the cross, branches of the meskal plant are decorated with flowers and set ablaze. The celebration begins in the afternoon and may continue through the evening hours. The center of attention is a large pyramid-shaped pyre. Atop the pyramid is a tall cross made from the bright yellow meskal flowers. Around the pyre, a procession of priests in liturgical garb and laypeople dressed elaborately for the occasion circle the centerpiece carrying crosses and wooden torches decorated with olive leaves. As the sun sets, those with torches set the pyre alight.

On the next, with the giant fire having finally burned itself out, people return to the site and use the ash to mark their forehead with the sign of the cross.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ash Wednesday; Elevation of the True Cross; Ethiopian Church—Liturgical Year; Genna; Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross; Procession of the Cross.

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Michaelmas (September 29)

Michaelmas is a feast day of the Roman Catholic Church that celebrates the role of the archangel Michael and by extension of angels in general in the Christian life. Michael is one of several angels (such as Gabriel) who are singled out and mentioned multiple times in scripture. He first appears in the book of Daniel as an angelic prince in the vision Daniel had by the river Hiddekel (Daniel 10:13). He then is named in the book of Jude as one who disputed with the devil, and emerges most notably in the book of Revelation (12:7) where he wars victoriously in heaven fighting a dragon.

Though seen as a warrior who defended first Israel, and later the church, Christians also came to see him as a healer from whom the ill could receive care. Among the healing sites associated with Michael was the Michaelion, a church at Sosthenion, about 50 miles south of Constantinople, where he reportedly appeared to the emperor Constantine. A variety of feast days were kept in the ancient church at different locations. Then, late in the fifth century, on May 8 (the year is uncertain), Michael appeared at Monte Gargano, near Foggia, in southern Italy. Here he appeared not as the healer angel, but in his warrior aspect. Pope Gelasius I (r. 492–496) ordered the erection of a basilica at the site of the apparition. This apparition set the stage for a latter sighting of Michael in 663. In the evening, he was seen standing with a flaming sword in his hand atop the mountain as a storm raged. The next day, May 8, an Italian army from Sipontum was victorious over a Greek army loyal to the Byzantine emperor. After the victory, the church at Sipontum instituted a special feast to Michael to be held annually on May 8. This is the feast that spread throughout the Western Church. Originally commemorating the victory, it gradually was transformed into a commemoration of Michael's apparitions, though with references to his warrior role.

Michael is also said to have appeared to Saint Aubert, the bishop of Avranches, France, in 708 and asked him to build a church on a small island off the coast of Normandy, France, at the mouth of the Couesnon River now known as Mont-Saint-Michel. After several visitations, the reluctant Aubert finally began the work on what would become one of the more famous medieval churches.

Through the centuries, the May 8 date for commemorating Michael vied with September 29, the date of an early church in Rome dedicated to the archangel.



Saint Michael slays the dragon in this woodcutting by Albrecht Durer (1471–1528). (Library of Congress)

Gabriel (March 24) and Raphael (October 24) were abandoned and collapsed into Michaelmas.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Annunciation, Feast of the; George, Feast Day of St.; Joan of Arc, Saint's Day of St.

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Mid-Autumn Festival

The Mid-Autumn Festival occurs in the middle of the second of the three lunar months that make up the autumn season in China—the seventh, eighth, and ninth months. As the months are measured from new moon to new moon, the middle

By the reign of Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572) the May 8 date was widespread, but September 29 was also an important day falling close to the fall equinox. In England, it was associated with the withdrawal of herds from their summer pastures, the opening of the hunting season, and the beginning of the school year. It had become ingrained in British culture as one of the “quarter days,” a moment every three months set aside for the hiring of servants, the electing of magistrates, and caring for many legal matters. Michaelmas remains an important date in the Anglican calendar. In some parts of northern Europe, celebration includes the consumption of “Saint Michael’s Love,” a special wine.

In 1969, along with other revisions of the Roman liturgical calendar, the commemoration of the feasts to

of the month is always at a full moon. In a time before electricity, the moon was a more important illuminating force than in recent times, and the coming of a full moon at the time of the year when there were few clouds to obscure it and people were at the end of a long farming season were reasons enough for a pause to celebrate.

Buddhists contributed to this festival oriented on the moon by contributing several legends from India that introduced a connection between the moon and rabbits. According to one popular story, the Buddha summoned animals to him as he was preparing for the end of his earthly existence, but only 12 animals showed up to say goodbye. He acknowledged their presence by naming the years of the 12-year cycle in Chinese astrology after 1 of the 12 animals. Of these, the fourth to arrive before the Buddha was the rabbit. Another story tells of Buddha's prior incarnation as a rabbit. One day while traveling with an ape and a fox, he encountered a hungry beggar. The three left to find some food. The ape and fox returned with some, but the rabbit found nothing. In his determination to be of service, however, the rabbit made a fire and then jumped into it so that he would become food for the beggar. The beggar turned out to be the god Indra, who rewarded the rabbit by sending him to the moon.

Picked up by the Taoists, the rabbit on the moon was pictured as standing under a magical tree making the elixir of immortality. This image would be integrated with another story of Hou Yi and his wife Chang E, who lived in ancient China during the reign of the long-lived emperor Yao (2358–2258 BCE). Hou Yi was a member of the imperial guards known for his skill as an archer. At one point during Emperor Yao's reign, suddenly 10 suns appeared in the sky. Their combined heat made life unbearable and the emperor asked Hou Yi to get rid of them. With his arrows, he was able to get rid of nine of them. As a reward, he was summoned to the throne room of the Queen Mother of the West, who resided in the Kunlun Mountains, a very real set of mountains in western China which in places forms the northern border to Tibet. To the Taoists, this mountain was a heavenly place. Though geographically placed on earth, it was analogous to the Buddhists' Pure Land. When Hou Yi visited there, he was given a pill of immortality, but told to prepare himself with prayer and fasting before taking it. His wife, however, discovered the pill and took it. She found she could fly, and to escape her husband's anger, she flew to the moon.

On the moon, Chang E coughed and part of the pill flew out of her mouth. The pill became a jade rabbit and she a toad. Hou Yi in the meantime erected a new home on the sun. He is reunited with his wife monthly in the full moon.

These legends continue to inform what has become a family holiday in modern Chinese society, both in the People's Republic and the diaspora. It is a time to reunite with friends and family and to enjoy a characteristic Chinese delicacy, the moon cake. Moon cakes come in a variety of shapes and are filled with sweets, meats, or salty fillings.

The primary ritual of the Mid-Autumn Festival is conducted by women on the 15th day of the lunar month as the full moon reigns above. It occurs around an

open-air altar decorated with a picture of the moon goddess and some representation of the rabbit. Different food substances would be brought to the altar, a wine glass filled, and incense lit. The culmination of the ritual would see the women of the house bowing, what in Chinese is a kowtow, before the goddess. The ceremony ends with the burning of the moon goddess's picture, the act of burning not being a destructive act but one of communion and communication.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Spring Dragon Festival.

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Mid-Lent. See Lent

Mid-Pentecost, Feast of

The feast of mid-Pentecost, one of the lesser feasts of the Eastern Orthodox Church, is celebrated on the Wednesday 25 days after Easter, at the midpoint between Easter and Pentecost. The feast is seen as uniting themes of both Easter and Pentecost. Water is a popular symbol for this worship hour—Jesus representing the Water of Life, and the Holy Spirit of Pentecost pictured as being poured out on the people. As part of the service, there is usually a rite termed the Lesser Blessing of the Waters.

In the Orthodox Church, broad use is made of Holy or Blessed Water, a practice derived from the account of Jesus seeking baptism at the hand of John the Baptist. John preached baptism for repentance of sin, but as Jesus was without sin, his baptism is believed to have sanctified the water. Such sanctified water is an instrument of life-giving power. Each year at the Theophany feast in January, water is blessed to be used by the parish during the coming year. At several additional times, however, water may be blessed—Mid-Pentecost being such an occasion. Traditionally, such water was used to bless the fields in the early stages of the growing season.

In parts of Greece, this day became the occasion of a special ceremony to prayer from deliverance of scarlet fever, once a widespread and highly contagious disease

among children. It has now largely been wiped out by penicillin and other antibiotics. On this day, the children of the village would bake rolls, which were consumed at a banquet. One girl, selected for her unique name, would make a special ring-shaped cake. This cake was not eaten, but was divided among the children, taken home, and allowed to dry out. If a child came down with symptoms of scarlet fever, the cake piece would be pounded into powder and sprinkled over the body. It was believed to be a cure.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Pentecost; Theophany.

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Midsummer. See Summer Solstice

Miracles, Festival of Our Lady of (September)

The Festival of Our Lady of Miracles is the primary annual celebrative event of the Roman Catholic community on the island of Terceira, the Azores. The veneration of the Blessed Virgin as Our Lady of Miracles goes back to 1694, when a priest seeing a secluded place for meditation erected a small chapel on the western coast of the island near the village of Serreta, and inside the chapel, he placed a small statue of the Virgin. The chapel was later abandoned, and the statue moved to a church in another village, Doze Ribeiras.

In 1764, Portuguese military personnel arrived to inspect the island's defenses relative to defending the island from invasion from other European powers. They visited the church in Doze Ribeiras and, in the presence of the statue, vowed that they would honor the Blessed Virgin with an annual celebration if the island was spared any attack upon it. The group making the vow named themselves the Slaves of Our Lady. Eight years later, the Slaves moved to build a new chapel at Serreta. Once in place, the statue was returned to it. In 1797, French forces threatened the island and a plan was initiated to reconstruct the wall around the chapel. The invasion never came, and over the next generation, both the population of Serreta and church membership grew. A new church was completed in 1842, and in 1861, it emerged as a separate independent parish. As the parish grew, so the annual celebration of Mary as Our Lady of Miracles grew, and an increasing number of miracle stories were attached to her.

Through the 20th century, the annual event in Serreta attracted more and more people, not only from the Azores, but Portugal as well. It included a weekend of activities the second weekend in September, the effort to get to the rather out-of-the-way location becoming a pilgrimage in itself. Saturday includes a procession, novenas, and an all-night prayer vigil in the church, which concludes with an early morning Mass on Sunday. The weekend also includes a blessing of the cows, a singing contest, and bull fights. The spontaneous singing is of peculiar conversational style unique to the Azores.

Early in the 20th century, Manuel B. Sousa, a citizen of Terceira, moved to the United States and settled in Gustine, California. There in 1936, he and some fellow Azorans started the practice of holding a festival to Our Lady of Miracles reminiscent of the one on Terceira. He commissioned a copy of the statue at Serreta. A group of local men began to organize an initial celebration at which they attempted to include as many of the events, both sacred and secular, associated with the one in Terceira as possible. Over time, the celebration became a major event in the lives of Portuguese-speaking Americans, who travel to Gustine from around the country to attend the annual event. Today the festival includes bull fights and performers brought in from the Azores and Portugal. The local church hosts a novena, a candlelight procession and a Mass at 4:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anne, Feast Day of St.

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Misa de Gallo (December 24)

Misa de Gallo, or Rooster’s Mass, is an early morning Mass or worship service held in the congregations of the Roman Catholic Church in many Spanish-speaking countries during the nine days before Christmas. The name relates to an old belief that a rooster was the logical animal to have witnessed the birth of Christ and at dawn to first to herald the event.

In the Philippines, the Misa de Gallo forms a novena (a devotion done in nine parts) also called the Simbang Gabi (or mass at dawn). The Simbang Gabi Mass is held each day in the early morning hours between December 16 and 24, and time to end at about dawn when the rooster crows. The Cock’s crow on December 16 marks the official opening of the Christmas season in the Philippines. During the next nine days, upon arriving at and leaving the church service, the faithful will encounter vendors selling some traditional food such as *puto bumbong* (a rice pastry seasoned with coconut and brown sugar and cooked in bamboo) and *bibingka* (small rice cakes), and for the thirsty, *tsokolate* (a hot chocolate-flavored drink) or *salabat* (a ginger tea).

The last Misa de Gallo on the morning of Christmas Eve will be followed in the evening with a feast called *Noche Buena*. The feasting and partying will take up much of the evening into the wee hours of the morning. After a brief rest, the faithful will attend Christmas Mass at around 10:00 a.m. and then participate in another Christmas feast.

The Misa de Gallo is equivalent to the Las Posadas celebration in Latin America.

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See also Advent; Christmas; Posadas, Las.

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Mokshada Ekadashi

Mokshada Ekadashi is one of the ekadashi dates (the 11th day after the new or full moon) that has gained special significance among Vaishnava Hindus. It is observed during the waxing moon in the month of Agrahayana (November–December in the Common Era calendar).

The story behind this ekadashi is found in the Brahmanda Purana, one of the Hindu holy texts, in which the deity Krishna tell Yudhishtira that fasting and worship on this day destroys all one's sins. This day has gained additional importance from a belief that its observance will assist one's deceased ancestors. This belief is attached to the legend of King Vaikanasa, who dreamed that his father was in the hell realm. He sought the advice of Parvata Muni, a legendary sage in Vaishnava literature, who was known for his ability to fly through spiritual realms and had knowledge of past and future. The sage discovered that the king's father had committed some evils that led to his being sent to hell. He then advised the king to observe Mokshada Ekadashi, which soon led to his father's release.

The most devout and able will fast completely on the ekadashi. Others, unable to reach that austere level, will do a partial fast. They will consume only vegetarian items while avoiding foods made with beans, pulses, and grains, especially rice, and not use onion or garlic in the food preparation. They are left with primarily fruits, milk products, vegetables, and nuts.

Mokshada Ekadashi occurs on the same day that many celebrate as Gita Jayanti, the birthday of the Gita.

Constance A. Jones



The Monkey King stands in Buddha's magic hand.
(Shupian/Dreamstime.com)

See also Gita Jayanti; Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Mauna Agyaras; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Monkey King, Birthday of the

The Monkey King (God) of China (not to be confused with Hanuman, the monkey god of Hinduism) is the product of fiction, having begun life

in a novel, *Pilgrim to the West*, written by Wu Cheng'en (c. 1500–c. 1582), during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The novel recounts how Xuan Zang, a Buddhist monk of the Tang dynasty (618–907), endured many obstacles imposed by various supernatural characters and finally gets to the West (i.e., India) assisted by his three disciples—Monkey King, Pig, and Friar Sha. The novel received popular acclaim and subsequently became an integral part of Chinese popular culture.

Monkey King (or Sun Wukong) emerges as possibly the most important figure in the novel. He acts freely and spontaneously, shows courage, and is unyielding in the face of the evil supernatural. He is also the epitome of loyalty to his master.

Pilgrim to the West also created a world with very fuzzy lines between the real and the imaginary. The author described real places, which his imaginary characters visit. He describes real parts of the Chinese religious hierarchy (such as the Jade Emperor) with wholly imaginary characters, such as Monkey King. In popular culture, the distinction between reality and fiction also seemed to have been blurred.

Monkey King is a minor Taoist figure appearing in a Buddhist novel. The novel, however, had the effect of elevating him to a high status, at least relative to popularity. Thus, in the wake of the novel's popularity, Monkey King temples began to appear, and a biography constructed.

Monkey King was especially celebrated on the 16th day of the eighth lunar month of the Chinese calendar (usually September on the Common Era calendar),

and celebrations are held at the surviving Monkey King temples in Hong Kong (Kowloon) and Taiwan. The birthday is celebrated with the burning of spirit money and incense. In generations past, the birthday was a time for talented spirit mediums to walk on hot coals and climb a ladder made of sharp blades.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Mazu Festival, Goddess; Pak Tai, Birthday of; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival

Immediately following Losar, the Tibetan New Year, and competing with it in importance for Tibetan Buddhists, Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival, begins on the fourth day of the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar and continues for a week, through the 11th day. The festival was initiated in 1409 by Tsong Khapa (1357–1419 CE), popularly termed Je Rinpoche (Precious Master). One of the most famous of Tibetan leaders, Tsong Khapa founded the Reformed or Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, the group later headed by the Dalai Lama, who came to also be the temporal ruler of Tibet. Given the political elements of Losar, Monlam emerges as a more focused religious celebration.

Tsong Khapa initiated the first Monlam festival with a ceremony during which he offered a golden crown to the statue of Gautama Buddha at the Jokhang Temple/Monastery near the Potala Palace in Lhasa. That temple became the focus of the annual prayer festival. The celebration waned in the latter half of the 15th century, but in 1518, Gedun Gyatso (1475–1542), then the abbot of Drepung monastery, posthumously designated the second Dalai Lama, revived it, and called the monks from the two other prominent Gelugpa monasteries at Sera and Gaden, to join with him. These three monasteries were the training grounds for the Gelugpa monks, and their gathering in one place became the occasion for lengthy and lively theological discussions. These discussions allowed them to demonstrate what they had learned and formed part of their final examinations for the Buddhist philosophy degree, the Lharampa Geshe degree. From this time, debates on Buddhist teachings became an integral part of Monlam. Monks would also demonstrate their skills in the elaborate traditional cham dancing.

Monlam occurred, of course, while Tibetans throughout the land continued to celebrate Losar, the New Year. Monasteries across Tibet held special ceremonies

and as part of their celebration unfold large *thankas*, holy pictures of Buddhist deities, on the side of the mountains for the veneration of all. The festival is designed to focus attention on Gautama Buddha's personal victory over the ignorance, anger, and greed, and his subsequent attainment of enlightenment.

Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, the celebration of Monlam suffered greatly. It was banned altogether during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). It was revived in the mid-1980s but again banned in 1990. It has gradually been reintroduced in Tibet and at Tibetan temples across China, but its celebration has been a matter of contention in Lhasa itself as monks have become active in protesting the government and calling for the return of the Dalai Lama. As the majority of Tibetans now reside outside Tibet, some of the larger festivals are held in places such as Tongren, Qinghai Province, and the Labrang monastery in Xiahe, the site of the largest Tibetan monastery outside Tibet.

As the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism were reestablished among the self-imposed exiles in India, and the new monastic centers erected, the Monlam festival was revived in stages. Early on, the Venerable Tarthang Tulku, a Nyingmapa lama who had established himself in California, combined his interest in the further development of the Buddhist shrine at Bodh Gaya (where Gautama Buddha received enlightenment) with his concern for the perpetuation of Tibetan Buddhism in the modern world. Beginning in 1989, he provided sponsorship and support for the Monlam gatherings of the leaders of all four schools for the first World Peace Ceremony, which has continued to be held annually. During the early 1990s, the Tibetan leadership that met at Bodh Gaya began to envision Monlam celebration as each of the important sights connected with Buddha's life, especially Lumbini, Sarnath, and Kusinagara. Thus, for example, in 1993, the Sakyapa and Kagyu schools began sponsoring an annual Monlam celebration at Lumbini (in Nepal), where Gautama Buddha was born. In India and Nepal, the Gelugpa School, headed by the Dalai Lama, sponsors the Monlam gathering at Sarnath, as well as at their headquarters in Dharamsala. Monlam occurs as Hindus are celebrating Diwali, the largest national festival in the two countries.

The Monlam celebration officially ends in the 11th day of the month, but festivities continue until the 15th, the day of the Butter Lamp Festival. During Monlam, huge ritual-offering cakes (called *tormas*) are made, each topped with an elaborate sculpture made from butter (which in Tibet has many uses, including being burned in lamps for light). Traditionally, on the 15th day, the Monlam (and New Year's) festival would culminate in Baektor Square in front of Jokhang Temple. The *tormas* would be on display for all to see and the day's event would conclude with *tormas* being brought together in a bonfire.

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See also Butter Lamp Festival; Diwali; Losar; Sakya Dawa Festival; World Peace Ceremony.

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Montségur Day (March 16)

Montségur Day remembers the 13th-century Gnostics from southern France, the Cathars (also called Albigensians, as their community was centered on the city of Albi). The Cathars had roots in both the Paulician movement of Armenia and the Bogomils of the southern Balkans, with a tendency toward dualism that suggested contact with Manichaeism. The Roman Catholic Church regarded the sect as heretical in the extreme. Initially, it initiated some peaceful efforts at conversion, undertaken by Dominic, an effort that would lead to the formation of the Dominican order. These proved insufficient, however, and eventually, Church leaders called for a military solution, which was led by knights from northern France and Germany.

In the first significant engagement of the war, the town of Béziers was besieged on July 22, 1209, and some 20,000 people killed, including many women and children and the city burned to the ground. The war took 20 years to complete and ended in 1229 with the Treaty of Paris (1229). It ended any support the movement leaders could expect from the local nobility. Meanwhile, in 1215, Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) called the Fourth Council of the Lateran, primarily to combat the Cathar heresy. What is now known as the Inquisition would be established as the war ended in 1229 to finally deal with remnants of the Cathar movement. It operated through southern France for the rest of the century and much of the next. Unrepentant Cathars were hanged or burnt at the stake.

In one of the last military actions, the French army besieged the Cathar fortress of Montségur (from May 1243 to March 1244). After the castle fell, on March 16, 1244, over 200 Cathar prefects were burnt at the stake.

Some historians estimate that at least as many as a quarter of a million Cathars and sympathetic neighbors died in the effort to suppress them. These are the people, not the several hundred massacred at Montségur, who are remembered on Montségur Day. The Ecclesia Gnostica commemorates them and identifies with them by holding a solemn Requiem Eucharist.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Sophia, The Descent and Assumption of Holy; Templars, The Day of the Martyrdom of the Holy; Valentinus, Feast of the Holy.

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Most Holy Name of Mary, Feast of the (September 12)

The Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary, a moment for believers to contemplate the meaning of Mary and her role in the whole scheme of salvation under her various names and appearances, is a relatively new item in the church calendar. The celebration of such a day of contemplation was assigned to the diocese of Cuenca (Spain) by Pope Julius II in 1513. He also placed it on September 15, a week after the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary. Later in the century, when the liturgical life of the church was reviewed as part of the Counter-Reformation, Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572) removed the observation of the day from the calendar, but it was replaced by Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) though he shifted it to September 17. The celebration spread throughout Spain and southern Italy. Its popularization was assisted by its being picked up by several religious orders.

Then on September 12, 1683, Polish king John Sobieski, a Marian devotee, won an important battle with the Turkish forces that were threatening Vienna. In response to the victory, Pope Innocent XI (r. 1676–1689) both elevated and redefined the “The Feast of the Holy Name of Mary” as a celebration of the whole of the Roman Catholic Church. The feast would continue to be celebrated on the Sunday after the Feast of the Nativity of Mary (September 8) until the 20th century when Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) set the celebration on September 12, an emphasis of the day as a remembrance of the 1683 victory at Vienna.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Assumption of the Virgin; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Most Precious Blood, Feast of the (July 1)

The blood of Jesus has for Christians been a symbol of God's healing power since the beginning of the church in the first century. The most ubiquitous event in all Christian churches has been the celebration of the Eucharist, in which wine is consumed as emblematic of Christ's blood. Among Protestants, the 1899 hymn by Lewis E. Jones, "Power in the Blood," remains popular. Among Roman Catholics, relics reputed to be of Christ's blood surfaced as early as the 6th century in the West, the most well known being kept at Bruges, Belgium, in the 12th century.

A special day to acknowledge the salvation brought by the spilling of Jesus's blood on the cross appeared in medieval Spain. That idea gained greater acceptance in 1815 with the foundation of the apostolic association of priests and lay brothers called the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, a Roman Catholic community of priests and brothers by Gaspar del Bufalo (1786–1837). The pope granted the missionaries the privilege of observing the day on the fourth Friday in Lent.

Then in the middle of the 19th century, the future of the celebration of the blood was caught up in the midst of the social unrest that led to the destruction of the Papal States and their incorporation into a unified Italy. Unrest in Rome peaked in 1849 when Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) was driven from Rome into exile at Gaëta, a fortress on Italy's western coast between Naples and Rome. Among those accompanying the pope into exile was Don Giovanni Merlini, who at the time led the Fathers of the Most Precious Blood. Once at the fortress, he suggested that the pope make a vow to extend the feast of the Precious Blood to the entire Church if and when he regained control of the Papal States. After considering the suggestion, he decided against the vow and instead placed the feast on the general church calendar immediately. This event happened to coincide with the French army's moving into Rome and temporarily returning it to papal control. A few weeks later, the pope decreed that the first Sunday of July should be celebrated in remembrance of the Most Precious Blood. The French intervention was but a temporary move that delayed but did not stop the unification of Italy, which culminated in the Italian army seizing control of Rome in 1870 and the Lateran Treaty of 1929 that created the present Vatican City state.

Pope Pius X (r. 1902–1914) moved the feast from the first Sunday in July to its present day, July 1. The call of the Second Vatican Council encouraging Christians to venerate the whole person of Christ has led to the dropping of the feast from the liturgical calendar of the general church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Holy Week; Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross.

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Mother, Birthday of the (February 21)

The Mother is the term the followers of Indian spiritual teacher Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) gave to Mirra Richard (1878–1973), who became Aurobindo’s companion, collaborator, and successor as head of the ashram he founded in Pondicherry, India. Richard was born in Paris and seemed destined for a life in the arts as a musician and/or painter. She developed an interest in things spiritual and esoteric, however, and in 1906–1907, she ventured to Algeria to pursue her interests. She emerged as a teacher of Esotericism. In 1914, she first visited India, met Aurobindo, and immediately viewed him as the spiritual guide she had been seeking. She returned to India, where she would remain for the rest of her life.

Through the early 1920s, the number of people who responded to Aurobindo and his approach to yoga and Hinduism grew substantially, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram emerged as their organization. In 1926, Aurobindo entered a period of seclusion and turned over the administration of the ashram and the regular interaction with the disciples to the Mother. She continued to lead the ashram after Aurobindo’s death in 1950, and went on to found Auroville, the utopian community built to demonstrate Aurobindo’s vision for the world. During her years of leadership, she acquired the same devoted following that had originally gathered around her teacher.

During the years that Aurobindo lived in seclusion, the two of them gave darshan (allowed the disciples to view them and giving them a blessing) on four occasions each year—their birthdays, the day that Aurobindo experienced the descent of the deity Krishna into him, and the anniversary of the Mother’s final arrival in Pondicherry. After Richard’s death, her giving darshan on her birthday was continued as a celebration of her life and work.

The living quarters of Aurobindo and the Mother were turned into shrines following their deaths. Today, on the Mother’s birthday anniversary, her former living quarters are opened for members of the ashram to visit. It was also the practice of the Mother to give written messages to those who came for darshan. In her memory, the present leadership of the ashram gives message cards with sayings drawn from her writings to those who come to the ashram to remember her on her birthday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aurobindo, Birth Anniversary of Sri; Siddha Day.

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Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday, observed through much of Europe, is a day for honoring one's mother (the equivalent of Mother's Day in the United States). This appears to have begun as matronalia, a Pagan holiday in the Roman Empire during which the mother goddess Cybele was honored by baking and offering her cakes made of simila flour. As the church grew and superseded the Pagan faith, it seems to have incorporated the Cybele celebration with the addition of a day for honoring the church as mother. In many places, this took the form of seeking out the local cathedral, the symbolic mother church of a city and its surrounding countryside, or return to the church in which they were baptized and in which they grew to adulthood. The day to visit the mother church was on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

Mothering Sunday gradually changed into a day to honor one's physical mother. In various places, it was a day in which young servants were given a day off to visit their family. Often, they would be allowed to bake a cake or cookies to take home to their mother. It was also a day in which the Lenten fasting regulations were somewhat lifted, that action being tied to Jesus's feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:44). In recent centuries, the favored cake was a Simnel cake, a raisin/plum cake with a layer of marzipan (sugar almond paste) on top. It would be decorated with 11 marzipan balls symbolic of Jesus's 12 apostles, minus the one who betrayed him. The cake would often be set aside until Easter so as not to violate the Lenten fast.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Lent; Mother's Day.

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Mother's Day

Mother's Day is a modern holiday, secular in origin and meaning, but widely adopted by religions and now integrated into many religious calendars.

The modern holiday originated from a “Mother’s Day Proclamation” written in 1870 by Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910). It grew from her reaction to the many deaths incurred during the American Civil War (1860–1865). Her proclamation sounded more like a call for women to assume power than a call for men to honor them. The major sentiment was stated thusly: “We, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.” The actual call was for an international congress of women to work for the cause of peace. Howe’s view of the role of women in the governance of the world would be echoed in the next generation by the likes of Frances Willard (1839–1898) and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The idea would bear fruit in the International Women’s Day (March 8) that was first celebrated in 1909.

Meanwhile, Anna Jarvis (1864–1948) had reacted to her own mother’s death in 1905 by starting a campaign to make “Mother’s Day” a recognized holiday in the United States. Her campaign culminated in success in 1914. Over the next decade, the holiday caught on and was celebrated across the country, but she was extremely upset by the superficiality of the celebration and the commercialization of her idea. She moved to incorporate the Mother’s Day International Association, and trademarked the phrases “second Sunday in May” and “Mother’s Day.” However, the day had by this time become larger than anything she could control.

In the United States, most churches celebrate Mother’s Day with activities integrated into the worship hour on the second Sunday in May. After worship, it is common for husbands and children to take mothers and grandmothers for a special dinner.

Since World War II, a number of countries have copied the United States in designating an annual Mother’s Day. The largest number kept the day largely as it was practiced in the United States and maintained its celebration on the second Sunday of May. Some countries already had such a day; England, for example, had a traditional Mothering Sunday. In Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian countries, the day may be filled with content from images of Mary as the ideal mother of Jesus and Mother’s Day celebrated along with an emphasis on the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Spain and Portugal, Mother’s Day coincides with the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8). Islamic countries will most often celebrate Mother’s Day on the spring equinox. It was initially celebrated in Egypt and from there spread to other Middle Eastern countries.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Mothering Sunday; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Mount Carmel, Feast Day of Our Lady of (July 16)

Among the many names given to the Blessed Virgin Mary is Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which originated with her role as the patroness of the Carmelite order. The Carmelites emerged from among a group of Christian hermits that resided on Mount Carmel in Palestine at the end of the 12th century. Mount Carmel was famous as the ancient site of the prophet Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of the god Baal. In the 13th century, the hermits built a chapel to the Virgin on the mountain.

From Carmel, the order spread across Europe. Shortly after the order settled in England, in the mid-13th century, a British Carmelite monk, Simon Stock, was reported to have had an apparition of the Virgin in which she promised special favors to any who wore the brown scapular, which became the distinguishing part of the Carmelite monk's habit. The monks wore a scapular, basically a work apron, over the brown belted tunic that they had adopted as their habit. A smaller stylized form of the scapular would be adopted for supporters of the order to wear.

While the story of the scapular became part of the lore of the order, its historicity was challenged in the 17th century, and in the process of defending it, a Carmelite leader produced a fraudulent document purporting to have recorded the date of the apparition, July 16. Modern Carmelites admit to the lack of documentary evidence of the apparition, but retain its use as a sign of Mary's role as the order's protectress. Its use has survived the criticism and maintains papal approval. The use of the brown scapular is tied to membership in the Carmelite's larger community, as devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel is viewed by Rome as devotion as tied to the history and spiritual values of Carmelites.

The feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel seems to date from the last half of the 14th century in England. It also seems to have emerged quite apart from the use of the scapular. The original date selected was July 17, but since that date conflicted with the feast day of the fifth-century saint Alexis, the feast day of our Lady of Mount Carmel was moved to July 16. As late as 2001, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005), on what would be the 750th anniversary of the reputed vision to Simon Stocks, professed to have worn the brown scapular for many years.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Lourdes, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Rosary, Feast of Our Lady of the.

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Mudras

The word *mudra* derives from a set of words in ancient India that carried ideas of authority, the imprint left in wax from a seal, and the way one artistically positions one’s fingers. Those words evolved to designate hand gestures or positions that enhanced the spoken word and conveyed a mystical or occult meaning. In Hindu paintings and statues, the deities were pictured with what appears to outside observers as very unusual or even strained hand gestures. Some appear as if a movement has been caught in the middle or with the fingers entwined in a complicated pattern.

Mudras have had intimate connection to the art of the dance as it developed in India, and the graceful hand gestures so characteristic of much traditional Indian dance are mudras. Mudras have also become a very common element of Hindu pujas (worship), adding content to ritual performance beyond the words spoken. While mudras are not the subject of holidays directly, in both Indian-based holiday celebrations and the worship accompanying Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists, the use of mudras and their depiction in the environment where worship occurs supplies essential content of the holiday activity.

In the act of creating mudras, each finger is assigned a relationship to one of the five classical elements:

Thumb	Agni/fire
Forefinger	Vayu/air
Middle finger	Akash/ether
Ring finger	Prithvi/earth
Little finger	Jal/water

Mudras can also be classified as *Aasanyukta* (single-handed mudras) or *Sawyakta* (double-handed).

The oft-seen Abhaya or fearlessness gesture is a good example of an Aasaanyukta mudra. It is made simply by lifting the right hand to shoulder height with the palm open and facing forward. It represents benevolence, the absence of fear, and the granting of protection. The Pankaj or Lotus mudra is a simple Sawyata mudra. The two hands are brought together in such a way that the fingers are separated and pointed upward, with the two thumbs and the two little fingers touching

each other. The person making the symbol is suggesting that like the lotus is detached from the mud below it, so he or she is detached from the world while in meditation. The Pankaj mudra also emphasizes the fire and water elements represented by the thumb and little finger.

Within Mahayana Buddhism, mudras are popularly used to distinguish the different deities whose bodies and faces are often identical in works of art. Thus in statuary and paintings, the different Buddhas and bodhisattvas may most often be identified, amid dozens of very similar representations, by the mudra he or she assumes (along with the objects held). Within Vajrayana or Esoteric Buddhism, mudras have been assigned additional meanings as symbols of various aspects of Esoteric reality. Mudras are designed to evoke both meaning and power among those who understand their significance.

Of the many mudras, five have become central to the presentation of images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. The Dharmachakra mudra, for example recalls the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath. Both hands are pictured with the thumb and forefinger touching to form a circle (the Wheel of the Dharma), and the three remaining fingers extended, to which additional meaning is ascribed. The Bhumi-parsha mudra recalls the Buddha's enlightenment, with the right hand touching the earth and the left hand placed flat in the lap. The Varada mudra, emphasizing the Buddha's charity and compassion, shows the left hand, palm up and fingers extended. The Dhyana mudra is made with the left hand placed in the lap, a symbol of wisdom (a feminine virtue). Various symbolic objects may then be placed in the open palm. The Abhaya mudra, usually pictured with a standing figure, shows the right hand raised and the palm facing outward. The left hand is at the side of the body, often with the palm also facing outward.

In Esoteric Buddhism, the five Dhayani Buddhas are key deity figures. They are not thought of as historical figures who have reached enlightenment, but are transcendent beings symbolizing universal principles. Each Dhyani Buddha is associated with a spectrum of attributes and symbols. Each one, for example, represents one of the five basic wisdoms, and thus each one can transform one of the five deadly poisons that afflict humankind into one of the wisdoms. When pictured in Tibetan iconography, the five Buddhas are commonly shown sitting cross-legged in the meditative position and at first glance appear to be exactly the same, especially in statuary where the colors that often distinguishes the five Buddhas has been abandoned. What really distinguishes the five Buddhas, however, are the mudras; each one is always shown with one of the basic mudras traditionally identified with the wisdom they embody. The Buddhas and the mudra they demonstrate are:

Vairocana	Dharma chakra, or wheel-turning mudra
Akshobhya	Bhumisparsa, or witness mudra
Ratnasambhava	Varada, or charity mudra
Amitabha	Dhyana mudra
Amogasiddha	Abhaya, or fearlessness mudra

The most ubiquitous bodhisattva in Asia is Guan Yin (a.k.a. Avalokitesvara), who will be shown with a range of mudras or their variations. In one form, the thousand-armed Guan Yin, many of the hands are arranged to show different mudras.

Those who understand mudras will recognize that the Zen Buddhist practitioner, while engaged in zazen or sitting meditation, places their hands in what is known as the cosmic mudra. One hand rests on top of the other, with palms open and up. The joints of the two middle fingers rest on top of the other, and the tips of the thumbs are touching lightly.

In Esoteric Buddhist practice, unique hand positions indicate to the faithful the nature and the function of the deities, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas on which they gaze. Mudras thus symbolize divine manifestation. Teachers use them in rituals and spiritual exercises as aids to the invocation of the deity. When understood in its magical context, the use of mudras by the practitioner facilitates the flow of the invisible forces within the earthly sphere. Some hypothesize that the sequence of hand postures that manifest in ritual contexts may stand behind their entry and evolution in Indian classical dance. Esoteric Buddhists see mudras as physical movements that alter perception and deepen awareness. Their use can assist the awakening of the chakras (energy centers believed to exist along the spine) and the flow of kundalini (the energy that travels along the spine and accompanying enlightenment).

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See also Guan Yin's Birthday; Wesak/Vesak.

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Muktananda, Birthday of Swami Paramahansa (May 16)

Swami Muktananda (1908–1982) was a spiritual teacher (guru) from India who built a global following through the 1970s. As a young adult, he adopted the life

of a *sadhu*, a wandering mendicant, and launched a search of spiritual enlightenment. Though becoming adept in yoga and meditation, his life was changed after he met Bhagavan Nityananda (c. 1897–1961). Nityananda gave the young sadhu shaktipat initiation, through which his *kundalini* energy, pictured lying latent at the base of the spine, was released to travel up his spinal column and project him into an enlightened state. After nine years under Nityananda's guidance, Muktananda attained the state of God-realization in 1955.

In the 1970s, Swami Muktananda brought Nityananda's tradition to the West and introduced thousands to shaktipat initiation. As the movement around him grew, he established the Gurudev Siddha Peeth in India and the SYDA Foundation in the United States to organize his following. He authored several dozen books.

The SYDA Foundation continues under the leadership of Swami Chidvilasanda, who perpetuates Swami Muktananda's spiritual legacy to the world. In honor of Muktananda's birthday each May, Siddha Yogis meet together in their local ashrams for what is termed the Global Siddha Yoga Audio Satsang, an international gathering tied together by modern Internet communications. Via the Internet, individuals may participate in the meditation, chanting, and teachings at their local center or in their home.

The foundation sponsors three such Global Siddha Yoga Audio Satsangs annually, on Muktananda's Birthday, the anniversary of his Mahasamadhi (October 16), and New Year's.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Lahiri Mahasaya, Commemoration Days for; Prasadji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa.

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Munmyo Ceremony

Munmyo is a Confucian shrine located in Seoul and constructed (1398) during the reign of King Taejo (r. 1392–1398), the founder of the Choson kingdom (1392–1910). It has been destroyed on several occasions, but always rebuilt and restored, the last time in 1869. The shrine houses tablets to Confucius and other famous Confucian scholars, most notably Choe Chiwon (who lived at the beginning of

the 10th century) and Seoul Chong (8th century). It is located on the campus of Sungkyunkwan University.

Twice annually, in the spring and fall, a ritual ceremony honoring Confucius and the ether enshrined scholars is held at Munmyo. The Seokjeonje ritual features the formalized line dancing called *ilmu* that was introduced into Korea in the 12th century from China. Ilmu is used to honor people of high status, especially Confucius and people considered like him. The accompanying music at Munmyo is delivered by a spectrum of traditional instruments including flutes, zithers, stone chimes, bronze bells, drums, and wooden clappers (*bak*).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese Religion; Confucius's Birthday; Chongmyo Cherye.

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Nagapanchami

Nagapanchami, a serpent-worshipping festival, is celebrated on the fifth day of the waning half of the Hindu lunar month of Shravana (July–August in the Common Era calendar). The snake, especially the cobra, has had an important role in Hindu thought and iconography since ancient times and is now seen in association with the foremost personages and divinities of not only Hinduism, but Buddhism and Jainism as well. The Hindu deity Shiva is pictured with a serpent around his neck as a necklace, while Vishnu rests on the divine serpent Adishesha, who in turn rests on the primordial Ocean of Milk. One story of the Buddha as he sat in meditation seeking enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree tells of the serpent king Mucalinda rising up beneath the earth to envelope the Buddha in his coils for seven days to protect the Buddha to allow his meditation to be undisturbed by an approaching storm. The Jain Tirthankara (saint) Parshvanath is also pictured in iconography as protected by a huge multi-headed cobra.

At different locations across India, shrines have been constructed at abandoned anthills where snakes reside and where people make offerings and feed the snakes with milk. In southwestern India, people often keep a Naga grove in the corner of their garden. Most often, the snakes are seen as a protective presence, but they are also valued for their associations with immortality and fertility.

Worship most often is directed toward the cobra, which often is seen as a being that can move between this mundane world and the all-powerful underworld. People both offer thanks to the snake for its auspicious presence and attempt to pacify the serpent world so that the snake will not bite the believer or his or her loved ones. Most Hindu temples will have one or more representations of nagas, either in their own right or by their association with the temple's main deity.

On Nagapanchami, the serpents such as Vasuki, considered a great king of the nagas, are worshipped, and offerings of milk, considered among their favorite foods, are presented to their images. Milk is also, of course, given to cobras on a daily basis by villagers throughout India. Snake charmers may be invited to perform on this day, and in certain areas, there are huge processions of men (and some women) who handle cobras in fulfillment of vows.

Constance A. Jones

See also Anant Chaturdashi.

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Nagasaki Kunchi (October 7–9)

The Autumn Kunchi (or festival) is the largest annual celebration in the city of Nagasaki. It emerged as a simple autumn festival in the 16th century but took on added importance as a shrine-center festival after the emergence of the Tokugawa Shogunate early in the 17th century and the construction of the new Suwa Shrine in 1642. The shrine in Nagasaki is one of many Suwa shrines, all of which are dedicated to Suwa-no-Kami, a kami of valor and duty. It is also home to two additional kami, Morisaki and Sumiyoshi, and the three together are seen as facilitating contact with the principal Shinto deity, Amaterasu. This shrine is also connected to Suwa Taisha, the head shrine of Suwa-no-Kami worship, located at Suwa, Japan. The festival at Nagasaki celebrates the three Shinto deities enshrined there.

While the Nagasaki Kunchi is a Shinto festival, its origin is intimately connected with Christianity. In 1614, The Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu issued the Christian Expulsion Edict, which banned Christianity in Japan, expelled all Christians and foreigners, and forbade Japanese-convert Christians from practicing their faith. The largest Christian community in Japan was in Nagasaki, and prior to 1614, it had been the site of a major annual Easter celebration that included a public procession.

That same year, the Shogun initiated construction of the Suwa Shrine, which was designed to replace some of the shrines that the Christians had destroyed. The shrine was a first step in forcing the reconversion of the Christians back to Shinto and Buddhism. The new shrine became a focus of Christian resistance. In 1634, a further edict was issued that required all Nagasaki citizens to register at the shrine. That fall, a great festival was organized to celebrate the shrine's deities, to encourage local participation in the shrine, and to discover any remaining secret Christians in the community. Those who refused to register were assumed to be Christians, and were subject to arrest and possible execution.

To expand the annual festival, the Shogunate supported the development of Nagasaki as a center for Noh drama, a form of classical Japanese musical drama that includes elaborate costumes and is especially known for the expensive masks

worn by the performers. Noh remained the main attraction of the growing festival until a fire in 1857 destroyed the costumes and masks. Replacement was prohibitively expensive, and the city altered the format. It invited different neighborhoods to compete with each other in creating performances. The result was a spectrum of new and different presentations that have come to represent the cosmopolitan nature of the contemporary city and often portray its colorful past, and the international heritage of different segments of the population.

Preparation for the October festival will begin in the summer months. The neighborhood performers will start rehearsals, and as the festival approaches, a large viewing stand will be built in front of the Suwa Shrine, the major presentation area. In spite of the official religious intent and the location of the primary festival events adjacent to the shrine, the presentations and the overall celebration has largely lost any religious content and tends more to reflect the historical and cultural past. Besides the stage at the shrine, two other larger staging areas are also constructed and many smaller ones are also present, so that the celebration permeates the city.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Chichibu Yomatsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; New Year's Day; Sakura Matsuri.

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Nanak's Birthday, Guru

Guru Nanak (1469–1539) was the founder of Sikhism, which he created by merging what he felt was the best of Islam and Hinduism. The religion and its community steadily evolved over the next several hundred years under the leadership of nine gurus who in turn succeed Nanak. The last of the gurus decreed that from that time forward, the Guru Granth Sahib, the book of writings of Nanak and the several gurus, would from that time forward be the community's new guru. Through the book, Guru Nanak's teachings have remained uppermost in the development of Sikhism.

Nanak was born in Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib, a village near Lahore, in what is now Pakistan. His birth occurred, according to the Hindu lunar calendar then in effect, on the third day of the light half of the month of Baisakh of

the year 1469 CE. This date has now been calculated to be on or about Saturday, April 15, 1469, on the Common Era calendar.

The Sikh community is in a transition concerning its celebration of Nanak's birthday. Until the 1990s, it was celebrated in November. However, in the 1990s, a new Sikh calendar was adopted. The calendar is a solar calendar, named the Nanakshahi calendar after Guru Nanak and based somewhat on the Common Era calendar. March 14 on the Common Era calendar is the first day of the New Year on the Nanakshahi calendar. The new calendar places Guru Nanak's birthday on Vaisakh 1 (or April 14). Most Sikhs now acknowledge that day.

Guru Nanak's birthday is one of 12 "Gurpurbs," holidays that commemorate the birth or death of one of the 10 Sikh gurus. Sikhs will celebrate the Gurpurb for Guru Nanak by performing an *Akhand Path*, a public reading of the Sikh holy scriptures, at both the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the main Sikh temple, and in gurdwaras (Sikh worship centers) around the world. To read the entire Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end requires two days. The reading will begin two days before the holiday to be commemorated and will end early in the morning of the holy day. Each person chosen to participate will read aloud for two to three hours.

Where possible, on the day prior to the actual birthday celebration, a procession may be held. It will include singers and musicians, and five men who dress to represent the *Panj Piare* (or Five Beloved Ones), the first five members to be formally initiated into the Sikh community.

On the day of the celebration, Sikhs will gather at the gurdwara, which will be decorated for a time of prayer, talks on various aspects of Sikhism, and the singing of *kirtans* (holy songs, in this case from the Guru Granth Sahib) followed by a communal meal. Activities for all ages may continue all day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday; Guru Granth Sahib, Celebration of the; Makar Sankranti; Martyrdom of Guru Arjan; Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

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Narak Chaturdashi

Yama is the Indian god of death and the underworld of the dead. He is the son of Visvasvat (or Surya), the sun. In the Vedas, he is seen as the first mortal to die

and thereby becomes king of the world of the dead. In the Vedic context, the realm of the dead is quite unlike hell, but more like an afterworld of satisfaction and pleasures; but in later Puranic descriptions, Naraka, Yama's realm, is depicted as a hell realm where sometimes even karmic retributions are meted out. Unlike the Christian hell, it is not a place of eternal torment, but of temporary punishment between incarnations.

Each year in parts of India, on the 14th day of the second half of the Hindu month of Kartika (in November on the Common Era calendar), Narak Chaturdashi is dedicated to Yama and celebrated with a ritual bath early in the morning before sunrise. Following the bath, believers offer three libations to Yama in the hope that it will please him, who will then spare the faithful any time in Naraka. During the day, a fast will be observed, and in the evening, lamps will be lit and offered to Yama.

Yama in his role as guardian of the realm of the dead appears in many contexts in Indian tradition. In the Katha Upanishad, he offers three boons to the young Nachiketas whom he had neglected. In the *Mahabharata*, he assumes an important role in the account of Savitri and Satyavan.

Constance A. Jones

See also Chaitra Purnima; Hanuman Jayanti; Makar Sankranti.

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Narasimha Jayanti

Narasimha (or Narsimha) is the fourth incarnation of the deity Vishnu. He appears as half man, half lion, with a human torso and lower body and a lion-like face and claws. The primary story concerning Narasimha appears in the *Bhagavata Purana*, an Indian holy book primarily associated with Vaishnava bhakti yoga or devotional traditions.

The ancient sage Kashyap married two women, Aditi and Diti. Diti became the mother of two sons, Hirnyakasha and Hirneykasipu. The latter, in order to take revenge on the one who slew his brother, underwent severe austerities and obtained a boon from the deity Brahma. The boon granted virtual immortality as it decreed that he could not be killed by any man or animal, either in the day or night, neither inside nor outside, nor by arms or by scriptures.



Statue of Narasimha Jayanti. (J. Gordon Melton)

Meanwhile, Hirneykasipu had a son, Prahalad, whose intent was to undertake devotion (bhakti) to Vishnu. Prahalad refused to quit his devotion in spite of his father's orders, as Hirneykasipu had come to hate Vishnu. One day, as Prahalad was lost in meditation, Hirneykasipu approached his son and pulled his sword. Because of his worshiping Vishnu, Hirneykasipu now saw Prahalad as his enemy, and threatened his life. In reaction to his son's refusal to stop his devotions, Hirneykasipu became outraged and struck the pillar of the temple with his sword. Suddenly, Narasimha appeared. The rare condi-

tions existed at that moment when Hirneykasipu could be killed, and the half man-half lion placed Hirneykasipu on his knees at the threshold of the temple and tore open his stomach.

Prahalad is now honored as an exemplar of bhakti devotion. His story is offered as a motivation to continue devotion even in the face of intense anger. Those who oppose the bhakti practitioner will be slain. Vishnu is seen as having incarnated on this occasion just to acknowledge Prahalad's devotion.

Narasimha Jayanti, the appearance day of Narasimha, is observed with fasting. Believers will take a ritual bath and purification, after which Vedic hymns will be chanted and the image of Narasimha venerated by the offering of donations and alms. At sunset, the time that is neither day nor night, aarti (offering light produced by burning wicks soaked in ghee or camphor) is done at the local temple. Observation of Narasimha is believed to lead to freedom from earthly difficulties.

Observation of Narasimha Jayanti, mostly by Vaishnava Hindus, occurs on the 14th day in the bright half of the Hindu month of Vaishakh. The story of Barsimha is also an integral part of Holi. Members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness maintain a fast through the daylight hours.

Constance A. Jones

See also Holi; Janmashtami; Onam; Parshurama Jayanti; Rama Navani; Vamana Jayanti.

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Narieli Purnima

In western India (Gujarat and Maharashtra), sailors, fishermen, and those who reside on the coast (primarily of Sindhi heritage) celebrate the full moon day of the Hindu month of Sharavana as Narieli Purnima. The intent of the observance is to stave off the fury of the sea god Varuna, a prominent deity in the ancient Hindu holy book, the Rig Veda.

Believers offer coconuts, a popular food to bring to the temple for gods, to Varuna’s abode, the sea, or if the sea is located at some distance, a local body of water that substitutes for it.

Constance A. Jones

See also Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord; Guru Purnima; Sharad Purnima.

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National Bible Week

National Bible Week is a celebration during the week of Thanksgiving in the United States to encourage the reading and study of the Christian Bible. It is sponsored and promoted by the National Bible Association, an interdenominational organization created in 1940 by a group of Christian business and professional people in New York City. The group’s original purpose was to strengthen the United States spiritually, given the war that had broken out in Europe the year before, and it appeared that the United States would be drawn into it. They reached an agreement that since the Bible was a proven source of hope and encouragement, it should be the focus of their efforts.

The idea of National Bible Week was initially proposed in 1941. The first National Bible Week was to be observed December 8–15, 1941. They received time to make an initial nationwide broadcast on NBC Radio on the evening of December 7. That day, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The idea behind the founding of the organization had happened in a most dramatic fashion.

The work of the small organization continued, and they began to contact the offices of mayors and governors across the country annually, asking them to proclaim the week of Thanksgiving (the fourth week of November) as National Bible

Week in their city or state. The organization also annually communicated with the White House, and regularly received words of encouragement from sitting U.S. presidents, beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Though not receiving any national proclamations, they regularly received letters of personal support on White House stationary. In 1990, George Bush accepted the post of honorary chairman of the event on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. President Clinton also served in that capacity for several years. In recent years, approximately 30 governors and 500 mayors issue National Bible Week proclamations annually.

A similar National Bible Week celebration was inaugurated in the Philippines in 1979 with a presidential proclamation on Ferdinand E. Marcos. His successors in office have followed his precedent and issued similar proclamations.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bible Sunday.

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National Brotherhood Week (February)

The National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) was founded in 1928, the occasion for its organization being the anti-Catholic bigotry expressed during the run of Al Smith, the governor of New York and a Roman Catholic, for president. A variety of religious leaders representing the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities felt the time had arrived to attack religious prejudices and misunderstandings head on. The Jewish community had felt the prejudice most critically, and had already organized the Anti-Defamation League to counter it. Through the 20th century, the NCCJ carried on a variety of programs to foster its goals.

In 1931, the Rt. Rev. Hugh L. McMenain, a Catholic priest and rector of the cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Denver, put forth the idea to his colleagues active in the NCCJ of a week each year that would focus the need for greater brotherhood. Eventually, the national organization agreed to sponsor the idea, and for half a century, promoted it.

By the end of the 1960s, the issues before the NCCJ had shifted radically. The civil rights movement had pushed the role of African Americans to the forefront, while Vatican II gave a boost to interfaith contact, especially among Catholics and Jews. The 1970s brought a much wider interfaith scene with the growth of the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim communities in the United States. The continuing crises in the Middle East demanded that Islam be brought into the dialogue. Finally, the rise of the feminist movement challenged the idea of brotherhood, women seeing it as more exclusionary than inclusive.

These many changes in the culture led in the 1980s to the NCCJ abandoning its program of the National Brotherhood Week, which had been generally held during the third week of February since the 1940s. Even more radical changes occurred in the 1990s, when the NCCJ went through a complete reorganization, even emerging with a new name—the National Conference for Community and Justice.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Yom HaShoah.

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National Day (July 28)

Eastern Orthodox Christians throughout Russia and the lands of the modern Russian diaspora celebrated 1988 as a holy year. A thousand years earlier, in 988, Prince (and now Saint) Vladimir I, the grand prince of Kiev, announced his formal conversion and symbolically led in the baptism of the people of Russia into the church. That event is marked as the beginning of the Russian Orthodox Church. That event is especially remembered in Ukraine, where Kiev is located. Ukrainians think of Vladimir’s action as leading to the Christianization of the whole of Eastern Europe.

The Kievan church began as an outpost of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (the Ecumenical Patriarchate). Through the ups and downs of history, Kiev lost much of its political significance in the 13th century and the Metropolitan moved first to Vladimir (1299) and then to Moscow (1325). The present Moscow Patriarchate thus continues the original Kiev Metropolitanate, and Russians see the medieval Kievan state as the predecessor to modern Russia, as much as it preceded modern Ukraine and Belarus.

The millennium year occurred in the last years of the Soviet Union. Since the fall of Soviet Russia in 1991, the vastly weakened Orthodox Church has made considerable progress in reestablishing itself as the primary religious organization of the contemporary nation (which operates under a secular constitution with provisions to maintain the separation between the state and the now-numerous religious organizations operating within it. Officials of the Russian Orthodox Church have made no secret of their desire to return it to its former position as Russia’s official state-supported religion. Russian political leaders have repeatedly spoken kindly of the Russian Orthodox Church and acknowledged its contributions to Russian life and culture. They have also indicated it as being the country’s main faith.

In June 2010, the government took a significant step in recognizing the Orthodox Church by creating National Day, a new official holiday that will

annually celebrate Russia's conversion to Christianity in 988. The legislation creating the new holiday was signed by President Dmitry Medvedev on June 1, 2010. In response, Muslims asked that a similar national holiday be proclaimed to mark the arrival of Islam in the land that constitutes contemporary Russia. Islam arrived in the area around the Caspian Sea even before the actions of Saint Vladimir.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts.; Vladimir, Saint's Day of St.

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National Day of Prayer

During the years of the Truman administration, the idea of a National Day of Prayer emerged in the U.S. Congress as a means of affirming the religious life of the nation. Originally suggested by evangelist Billy Graham, it gained traction when it was related to national goals opposing "godless" Communism. It was also promoted as a means for people, across their denominational and even religious boundaries, to participate in a single spiritual activity. As the idea found wide acceptance, the Congress began to annually designate a day when people were asked to come together and pray, with some attention to intercession with God on behalf of the country. The date varied from year to year until 1968, when President Ronald Reagan fixed it on the first Thursday in May.

It is of some interest that as an argument against those who saw the idea as an infringement of the separation of church and state, some argued that prayers were held during the Constitutional Convention (1781). When later investigated, the claim was found to have been erroneous. Historians discovered that no less a personage than Benjamin Franklin had suggested prayer, but found little support. It was never seriously considered. That consideration did not block the enactment of a national day of prayer, which President Truman signed shortly before completing his last term in office in 1952.

The idea of a National Day of Prayer backed by the government has continued to raise opposition, and different presidents have varied considerably in their attention to it. President Reagan and the first President Bush hosted only one event related to the day, and President Clinton none, while the second President Bush hosted a prayer event at the White House annually throughout his term.

The main focus of the National Day of Prayer, however, was not to be in Washington, but in numerous events across the United States. As the religious right emerged during the Reagan years, a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization was formed, the National Day of Prayer Task Force. It was led by a group of evangelical Christians, most notably James Dobson and his organization Focus on the Family, that had expressed the most interest in promoting the celebration. The task force has annually printed literature advocating a variety of events in observance of the day, while at the same time emphasizing a belief that America is a Christian nation and thus tending to limit leadership in task force–sponsored events to conservative Christians. The task force maintains a web presence at <http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/>.

In recent years, the observance of the National Day of Prayer has largely been limited to those evangelical Christians who see no problem with its observance relative to church-state considerations. The primary opposition to the day of prayer has come from atheist and Freethought groups. In 2008, one group, the Freedom from Religion Foundation based in Madison, Wisconsin, filed a suit against the Bush administration and the National Day of Prayer task force, later amended to include the Obama administration, to do away with the National Day of Prayer on constitutional grounds. The suit is ongoing as this encyclopedia goes to press. At the same time, various atheist groups have joined together to promote a National Day of Reason as an alternative to the National Day of Prayer.

J. Gordon Melton

See also National Day of Reason; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; World Day of Prayer.

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National Day of Reason

The National Day of Reason can be traced to 2003, when a variety of leadership in the community of Unbelief—secularists, atheists, humanists, Freethinkers—began to call for an response to the federally supported National Day of Prayer, which they viewed as both discriminatory and in violation of the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits the federal government from passing any legislation that tends to support the establishment of a religion. Over the years, observance of the Day of Prayer has been limited to the evangelical Christian

community. Especially during the years of the second Bush Administration, the promotion of the day largely fell to the National Day of Prayer Task Force, a non-governmental organization which was widely perceived to be working closely with cooperating government leadership.

The National Day of Reason was promoted as an alternative to the National Day of Prayer, and its observance is held on the same day. It is projected as a day to celebrate rational thinking by both the religious and nonreligious, regardless of their individual worldview. Operating from a much smaller base of operation in the community of Unbelief, advocates of the National Day of Reason have been less successful in inspiring events for its observance. Where observances are organized, however, leaders are encouraged to make them active events that involve service to the local community. Meanwhile, advocates want to communicate to the larger public the possibility of an inclusive and constitutional alternative to the National Day of Prayer, which they view as exclusionary.

In 2005, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, an atheist organization based in Madison, Wisconsin, petitioned the 50 state governors and other government officials to issue a proclamation declaring a day of reason to balance the proclamation supportive of a day of prayer. Though none of the governors responded positively, the mayor of the city of New Orleans, which had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina (2005), did issue such a proclamation.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; Freethought Day; Indivisible Day; National Day of Prayer.

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National Founding Day (Scientology)

Through the late 20th century to the present, the Church of Scientology spread from its founding in the United States to more than 70 countries, beginning with England, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. It then spread out across Europe and to the rest of the world. This global effort was increasingly fueled by the translation of founder L. Ron Hubbard’s Scientology writings into the world’s languages. An effort was made to accelerate the number of languages in which *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* was available for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of its publication (2000).

As the church spread, each occasion of the opening of the first local church center in each country was duly noted by the international leadership and became

the occasion for celebration. That day would subsequently be declared the National Founding Day for each country. It occurs on a different day of the year for each national organization, for example, Belgium (March 13), Denmark (June 3), Zimbabwe (September 18), and Japan (December 31). Commemoration of the date is also carried out as is locally appropriate.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Native Establishment beyond East and West (October 23)

Adidam is a spiritual community founded by Adavita Vedanta teacher Franklin Jones (1939–2008), better known by his religious name, Avatar Adi Da Samraj, believed by his followers to have been a fully enlightened guru (teacher). Each year in October, they begin a three-month period punctuated by the commemoration of the most significant events in a three-month holiday cycle that begins with the celebration of Adi Da's receiving citizenship from Fiji on October 23.

This event was the culmination of a process that had begun some five years earlier when he had announced his role as a human Incarnation of the Invisible Divine and subsequently initiated a small group of his devotees into an esoteric order. The formation of the ordered community led to his announcing that he would begin to work with these few for the sake of all. He also began an intense search for a Hermitage, which led him to Hawaii and then in 1983 to Fiji. He initially set foot on the Fijian island of Naitauba on October 27, 1983.

Once settled on Fiji, he began to speak about his role not just in the West, but in the whole world. He also began to see Fiji as the seat of his Divine Spiritual Power. Over the next decade, he would take steps to ensure that this Hermitage would be secure for him to continue his spiritual work forever. To secure the island, he applied for Fijian citizenship. On October 3, 1993, a representative of the government arrived on Naitauba and presented him with his passport. The island, located on the International Date Line, is symbolically neither East nor West. He interpreted the reception of his passport and the granting of citizenship as a sign of his having completed his work in the West and the beginning of his blessing the world. Four days later, on the 10th anniversary of his initially setting foot on the island, he conducted a ceremony to further empower the island.

October 27 is commemorated by Adi Da's disciples today as marking the point of a significant further expansion of his work and influence. It is also a time to gather and discuss their own roles in making their guru's message more broadly known.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Adi Da Samrajashram, Anniversary of Adi Da's First Footstep on; Avataric Divine Self-Emergence, Day of.

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Nativity of Mary (September 8)

In the biblical material on Mary, she is introduced as a young adult woman engaged to marry the carpenter Joseph. The Bible says nothing of her parents or birth. Mary's early life was discussed, however, in several extra-canonical works that circulated in the early church though not included in the Bible. Written in the mid-second century, the *Protoevangelium of James* (also known as *The Nativity of Mary* or the *Infancy Gospel of James*), names Mary's parents as Anne and Joachim and describes the visit by an angel who informed them that they were to become parents.

In the fifth century, a church was constructed in Jerusalem where many had come to be believed to be the site of Anne and Joachim's home. That church was destroyed and rebuilt in the sixth century, the consecration of the new building, named for Saint Anne, being the occasion for the development of a liturgical celebration of the birth of Mary, who was being increasingly honored as the *Theotokos*, or the Mother of God. In the flow of monks from East to West, the Feast of Mary's nativity was introduced to Rome. As the celebration grew, it was introduced with a fast and stretched to eight days (called an octave). At the end of the seventh century, Pope Sergius I (687–701) began to lead a procession from the Roman forum to Santa Maria Maggiore.

Various dates were celebrated as Mary's birthday, but September 8, a week (or octave) after the beginning of the year in the Byzantine calendar, became the most common. In later centuries, when a date was sought for the Immaculate Conception, the date of Mary's original conception in Anne's womb, the date chosen was nine months before her reputed birth date, or December 8.

The Nativity of Mary is celebrated by the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Catholic churches, all of which assign it a high level of importance at least as a

liturgical event, though the Eastern and Anglican churches do not adhere to the Roman pronouncements on the Immaculate Conception nor recognize it on their liturgical calendars.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anne, Feast Day of St; Annunciation, Feast of the; Christmas; Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the.

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Natsu Matsuri

Natsu Matsuri is a type of festival held in the Shinto shrines of Japan to honor the gods during the summer. As spring festivals are designed to pray from a good planting season leading to an abundant harvest, and autumn festivals offer thanks for the harvest, so summer festivals tend to be dedicated either to fishermen and those who make their living from the waters (Kaijin Matsuri), or for farmers who must contend with the various hazards to which their crops might fall victim—most notably pestilences, insects, and bad weather. During natsu matsuris, believers find their way to the Shinto shrines to entreat the deities (*kami*) for protection against such disasters. In the cities, where disease often broke out during the humid summers, the festival became a time to pray for the end of epidemics.

In Japan, summer festivals are a ubiquitous item, but the festival in Kyoto, the Gion Matsuri, has turned into a monthlong celebration. While originally built around the Yasaka Shrine, the other shrines such as Kitano Tenman-gū and the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine participate fully. In the modern world, with the possibility of limiting damage from disease and natural calamities, the summer festivals have become highly secularized and are now more about finding ways to escape the heat and have a good time than about paying attention to the source of the original festival.

One version of the summer festival known as Taue no Matsuri celebrates the transplanting of the young rice seedling into the ground.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kaza-Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Festival participants perform the Garba, a traditional folk dance, in a public square during Navaratri. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

Navaratri

The Navaratri (Navaratra) or “Nine Nights” festival (also known as Durga Puja, Dussehra, and in Nepal as Dasain) is celebrated in September–October (during the waxing moon half of the Hindu lunar month of Ashvina) for nine nights (and 10 days). This is a pan-Indian festival, which, as Holi welcomes the spring, welcomes the autumn season. Also, like Holi, it takes very different forms in different regions. In neighboring Nepal, as the national holiday, Dasain, it is the largest festival of the year, involving both Hindu and non-Hindu Nepalis alike in celebration.

In most Hindi-speaking areas of North India, Navaratri is centered on Rama, like Krishna an incarnation of the deity Vishnu. It is celebrated with a drama, the Rama Lila (the mysterious divine magic of Lord Rama), drawn from the *Ramayana* epic story. Here there are recitations every day from the medieval Hindi *Tulsidas Ramayana*, and in most places, plays that depict scenes from the *Ramayana* story are presented in smaller or grander scale.

The largest of the Rama Lila play is staged across the river from Benares, where the king (maharajah) of Benares established an immense ground that represents the *Ramayana* story. Actors go from station to station on different days as the story develops. On Vijayadashami—variously described as the culminating day of



Statue of the Hindu Goddess Durga. (J. Gordon Melton)

Navaratri or the day after Navaratri—the effigies of Rama’s enemy the demon king Ravana, along with his son Meghanada and his brother Kumbhakarna, are burned to celebrate the victory of Rama over the forces of the demons or Rakshasas.

In Bihar, Bengal, and Assam, the Navaratri festival, and in Nepal, Dasain, is celebrated as a Durga festival. Durga pujas or worship services are done for her on the last three days of the festival. The festival begins by awakening Durga, who is asleep, and continues by manufacturing a temporary image of her which is enlivened for the purpose of the festival.

On Vijayadashami, the image of Durga will be taken in a great procession to be immersed in the local body of water, be it a river or the ocean or a large tank. Lively festivities follow. In southern India, the goddess Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and the arts, is worshipped on the seventh day of the festival, and Durga only on the eighth day. On the ninth day, there is a worship of instruments and implements of livelihood, which are taken out to be honored with mantras and small offerings.

An additional tradition surrounding Durga and Navaratri concerns the Pandava brothers, important characters in the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Great warriors, all five brothers were married to one woman named Draupadi. At one point, they lived through a 14-year exile followed by a one-year period of incognito during which time they had to put away their distinctive weaponry. They hid it in a “Shami”

tree near their residence. When their incognito year was finished, they went to the tree and retrieved their weaponry. For its safe preservation, they offered worship and thanksgiving both to the Shami tree and the goddess Durga, the deity of strength and victory. Meanwhile, their rivals, the Kauravas, had invaded the region looking for them. After completing their devotions, the Pandavas went directly to engage in the Battle of Kurukshetra, at which they won a decisive victory. That day subsequently became known as “Vijayadashami” (“Vijaya” is Sanskrit for “Victory”). Today, on Vijayadashami, people give *Shami* leaves with a wish that the recipient have victory in their efforts.

While the most celebrated Navaratri festival is in the fall, there is also another Navaratri festival that is celebrated in the spring, during the waxing moon half of the Indian month of Chaitra (March–April). This spring event does not attain the level of the fall festival. The Jain festival of Navpad Oli overlaps the spring and fall celebrations of Navaratri.

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See also Dasain; Diwali; Holi; Navpad Oli.

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Navpad Oli

Navpad Oli is a nine-day festival observed by Jains twice a year in the spring and fall, the former in the waxing moon of the Indian month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar) and then during the waxing moon of Ashwina (September–October). Navpad Oli is designed to end on the day of the full moon, known as purnima. It is also set to begin close to, if not exactly on, the spring and fall equinoxes. Navpad Oli starts during the middle of Navaratri, the Hindu Durga Puja ritual, also held twice annually.

During Navpad Oli, the observant Jain will engage in a particular kind of fast termed Ayambil Tapa, in which a single meal of boiled grains without seasonings

like salt are eaten. The devotions shown are seen as keeping one mentally healthy and the fast as energizing the body to fight disease.

Navpad Oli is set aside to worship the nine “posts” or essential realities that uphold the universe, which are termed Arihant, Siddha, Acharya, Upadhyaya, Sadhu, Samyag Darshan, Samyag Jnyana, Samyag Charitra, and Samyag Tapa. The first five of these are equivalent to five posts to which the religious may climb and upon whom the universe depends. According to Jain teachings, anyone may attain any of these supreme posts (position) through the various disciplines of inner self-development. In reaching the first two “posts,” the aspirant passes beyond the point of physical embodiment. The next three posts are held by leaders in the present Jain community. The last four posts represent major virtues which anyone may attain and which lead to salvation (*moksha*). During Navpad Oli, each day is set aside to focus upon one of the nine posts.

1. The Arihant has attained freedom from all earthly attachments and hatreds.
2. The Siddha has attained and lives in perfect equilibrium, eternal peace, and joy, while remaining in perfect motionless rest.
3. The Archarya is the supreme authority in all the matters related to the Jain Sangha (the community of monks and nuns) and the interpretation of the Jain scriptures.
4. The Upadhyaya is the guru (teacher) who is responsible for educational activities in the Sangha, and who teaches the Jain monks and nuns.
5. The Sadhu is the renunciate who had begun the path to Arihanthood and devotes himself or herself to the path that leads to *moksha* (salvation). He had begun to practice the four sacred virtues.
6. Samyag Darshan, or right view.
7. Samyag Jnyana, or right knowledge.
8. Samyag Charitra, or right action or conduct.
9. Samyag Tapa, or austerity in abstaining from lusts and desires with the goal of reaching equilibrium and tranquility.

The nine posts are often represented symbolically in the Siddha Charka, a three-dimensional version of the yantra diagram. On a square base, the first five posts are represented as five men sitting in a meditative position, with one (the Arihant) in the center and the other four facing inward, each with their back to one of the four sides. The four virtues are then represented with symbols inside the four corners.

On the last day of the observance, the day of the full moon, Navpad Oli, Jain householders join the monks and nuns in the worship of Samyag Tapa. They will join in the Ayambil fast by eating the meal of boiled rice only, and will pray to attain to the virtue. They will also join the larger local community for the Navpad Mandal Puja.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mauna Agyaras; Mahavir Jayanti; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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Naw-Rúz, Festival of (March 21)

The Festival of the Naw-Rúz is one of five Bahá'í festivals and one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended.

On March 21, 2010, the United Nations marked the first "International Day for Nowruz" (Persian, "New Day"), an ancient spring festival of Persian origin (and the Zoroastrian New Year's Day) celebrated for over 3,000 years and enjoyed today by more than 300 million people worldwide as the beginning of the new year. Mary Boyce notes that it "seems a reasonable surmise that Nowrúz, the holiest of them all [Zoroastrian holy days], with deep doctrinal significance, was founded by Zoroaster himself" (Boyce, *Encyclopædia Iranica*). Naw-Rúz may be sacred or secular, depending on the setting. For Bahá'ís, Naw-Rúz is sacred, imbued with the symbolism of spiritual renewal.

As the first day of the Bahá'í New Year, Naw-Rúz coincides with the spring equinox in the Northern Hemisphere, which typically occurs on March 21. However, since Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith) enjoined that this festival be celebrated on whatever day the sun passes into the constellation of Aries—that is, the vernal equinox—Naw-Rúz could fall on March 19, 20, 21, or 22, depending on the precise time of the equinox (even should this occur one minute before sunset). It is expected that the precise timing of Naw-Rúz will require a designated spot on earth—to be decided by the Universal House of Justice (the governing international Bahá'í council) in the future—to serve as the standard for astronomically determining the spring equinox. Since Naw-Rúz also falls on the first day of a Bahá'í month, it coincides with the day on which a Nineteen-Day Feast is to be observed, but the two events must be kept separate.

Bahá'í communities typically observe Naw-Rúz and meetings that combine prayerful devotions with joyous fellowship. "Naw-Rúz is our New Year, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing" (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, 30). Bahá'ís from Iranian backgrounds may follow some traditions associated with the ancient Persian festival, but these cultural practices are kept distinct from the religious observance itself. To augment the festive joy, signal events are often

scheduled to take place on Naw-Rúz, being an ideal time for momentous announcements as well.

The Báb (1819–1850), precursor and herald of Bahá'u'lláh, created a new calendar—called the Badí‘ (“Wondrous”/“New”) calendar—which consists of 19 months of 19 days each, with four intercalary days (five in leap years) to round out the solar year. The only religious festival that the Báb had instituted was Naw-Rúz. The first day of the new year (i.e., the day of “Bahá’ ”) was Naw-Rúz (March 21), which the Báb specifically set apart in honor of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” whose advent the Báb foretold and whose appearance, as Bahá'u'lláh, the majority of the Báb's followers accepted. The Báb wrote:

God hath called that month the month of Bahá' (Splendour, Glory), meaning that therein lieth the splendour and glory of all months, and He hath singled it out for Him Whom God shall make manifest. (The Báb, *Persian Bayán* 5:3; provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 328)

Because this day was “singled it out for Him Whom God shall make manifest,” Naw-Rúz was highly symbolic and its observance pointed forward to that messianic figure for whose imminent advent it was the Báb's professed mission to prepare the world (and whom the majority of Bábís recognized as Bahá'u'lláh later on). The Báb described Naw-Rúz as the Day of God on which goodly acts performed would receive the recompense for same acts as though performed for an entire year, while those who recite a special verse 361 times would be preserved from anything ill-fated during the course of the coming year (The Báb, *Persian Bayán* 5:3). The Báb's laws, which were scarcely put into practice during the time of the Báb, were primarily intended to prepare his followers for the coming of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” and would be abrogated, except as accepted, at his advent. Such laws, as Nader Saiedi points out, were “not meant to be taken literally but instead perform a symbolic and profoundly transformative function” (Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 343).

Even so, Bahá'u'lláh preserved and adapted several of the Báb's major laws to be observed by the Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh formally ordained Naw-Rúz as a festival unto those who have observed the period of fasting that precedes Naw-Rúz:

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Rúz as a feast. Thus hath the Day-Star of Utterance shone forth above the horizon of the Book as decreed by Him Who is the Lord of the beginning and the end. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 25)

This Bahá'í law refers to the nineteen-day Fast (March 2–20), a period of spiritual discipline and purification, during which Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. (Bahá'í days begin and end at sunset.) Since the Fast ends on the sunset on which Naw-Rúz begins, Naw-Rúz celebrations are often combined with a dinner.

Unlike the other Bahá'í holy days, which commemorate historic events in Bahá'í history, Naw-Rúz has religious significance primarily due to its symbolism of renewal. As an Indo-European language, Persian is distantly related to English, which explains why the word “naw” (pronounced “no”) in Persian is similar to the English word “new.” Naw-Rúz not only heralds the advent of spring, but is also symbolic of a “spiritual springtime.” On a personal level, the Festival of Naw-Rúz is a time for renewal. On the occasion of Naw-Rúz in 1906, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), the successor to Bahá'u'lláh, wrote to the American Bahá'ís saying, in part:

It is New Year; . . . now is the beginning of a cycle of Reality, a New Cycle, a New Age, a New Century, a New Time and a New Year. . . I wish this blessing to appear and become manifest in the faces and characteristics of the believers, so that they, too, may become a new people, and . . . may make the world a new world, to the end that . . . the sword be turned into the olive branch; the flash of hatred become the flame of the love of God . . . all races as one race; and all national anthems harmonized into one melody. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 38–40)

Thus, this ancient Zoroastrian holy day and Persian springtime festival has been transformed into a Bahá'í holy day, which has, as its animating purpose, the creation of a new world in which a new era of peace and prosperity may be brought about through the universal Bahá'í principles of unity through diversity, famously expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in 1890 in a historic visit by Cambridge orientalist Edward G. Browne (*A Traveller's Narrative*, xl), in these oft-quoted words:

That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come.

Bahá'ís see this “New Day” as having transformed the vernal equinox into a universal celebration of the oneness of humankind.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Nehan

Many Buddhists believe that the birth, the day of enlightenment (at the age of 35), and death (in his 80s) of Gautama Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist movement, occurred on the same day of the year. That day, usually called Wesak, is the night of the full moon of the Hindu month of Vaisakha (usually in May on the Common Era calendar). Tibetans call it Sakya Dawa.

Other Buddhists, most notably those in Japan, hold their commemorations of those three events on separate days. Nehan, February 15, is the day Japanese Buddhists believe that Gautama Buddha died near the town of Kushinagara, almost due north of Calcutta near the border with Nepal, on the banks of the Hiranyavati River. The Buddha is often pictured in a reclining state, using his right hand as a pillow, calling to memory the moments before his death. Early accounts of his death suggest that he was sleeping on a bed between two sala trees whose white flowers fell continuously during his last day.

In his last discourse, called the Yuikyogyo, the Last Teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, he discussed the transitory state of life, noting that the physical body (even his) dies, and that it is the Dharma (the teaching) that is eternal. He also noted that he had withheld nothing from his teachings, that there were no secret teachings, nor any teachings with a hidden meaning. He closed by saying that “In a moment, I shall be passing into Nirvana.” His death is popularly referred to as the Mahanirvana or Parinirvana. In Japan, there are a variety of ways to



This painting on silk depicts Buddha's death. Followers show respect as Buddha achieves enlightenment and reaches Nirvana. (Corel)

the exact date of the celebration of Nehan may vary both to hold the celebration on the weekend and to facilitate the schedules of officials and guests who might make themselves available to several related local centers.

Japanese Buddhists celebrate the birth of the Buddha on April 8 (Hana Matsuri), of his enlightenment on December 8 (Bodhi Day), and the death on February 15.

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See also Bodhi Day; Hana Matsuri, Sakya Dawa Festival; Wesak/Vesak.

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celebrate Nehan, some peculiar to one group or another, some to different parts of the country.

One commemoration of Nehan at a contemporary Zen center "focuses on a moment when someone goes up to the altar and blows out all the candles and turns off the altar lamp. A statue of the dying Buddha, reclining on his side and surrounded by animals, has been placed on the altar for this ceremony. This is called a Parinirvana statue, indicating that it depicts the Buddha entering his final or complete nirvana (cessation), which comes only with physical death. Behind the statue is a small screen, and behind the screen is a single candle that remains lit. At the end of the ceremony, another person goes up and relights the altar from that single, hidden source."

Among Buddhists in North America,

Neri-kuyo

The Neri-kuyo is a Buddhist ceremony built around a procession in honor of Amida Buddha (or Amitabha). At this time, Amitabha descends to this world followed by 25 bodhisattvas to save the devout, most often the dying people, and lead them to the Pure Land. Amida is the Buddha of the Sukhavati, the Western Paradise that gives Pure Land Buddhism its popular designation. Pure Land forms of Buddhism (in Japan, the Jodo-shu and Jodo Shinshu sects) honor Amida above all the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattvas and believe that merely by calling on his name, one can be saved and brought to the Pure Land after death.

The word *kuhon* in Pure Land usage refers to the belief that deeds can be grouped on a goodness/badness scale of one to nine (*ku*), and what part of the Pure Land we will be assigned will be judged according to this scale. It is also the case that in statuary Amida's hands will be positioned in one of nine mudras.

Two Neri-kuyo celebrations are best known in Japan. One occurs in mid-October at Kamakura. The priest and members of Dairisan Ryogaku-in Kuhonji, a Jodo-shu temple, will process to Tenshozan Renge-in Komyoji, the largest of the dozen Kamakura Jodo-shu temples. The Neri-kuyo procession is occasioned by the annual Juya, or Ten Days of Prayer, festival that begins on October 13 every year at Komyoji. Even better known is the Neri-kuyo at Taima-dera in Nara, which occurs on May 14 every year. Officials at the temple dress as various bodhisattvas and lead a process through the temple grounds. Taima-dera was originally established in 612 at what is now Osaka, but in 681, it was moved to Nara. It is famous for a painting that depicts Amitabha, Kannon (Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy), and Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, together in the Pure Land.

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See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Harikuyo; Manjushri's Birthday; Mudras.

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New Church Day (June 19)

New Church Day celebrates the formal beginning of the Church of the New Jerusalem, the new movement that looks to the revelations received by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and his new perspective on the Christian religion. The "official" beginning of the New Church occurred in 1770 and its largely invisible initiation was recorded in Swedenborg's book, *The True Christian Religion*.

A scientist of note in his Swedish homeland after writing a number of works on a spectrum of scientific topics, in the mid-1740s, Swedenborg abandoned his career as the result of a vision of Jesus, and spent much of the rest of his life in conversations with the angelic world, from which he received a constant stream of revelations that led to his extensive “spiritual” commentaries on the Bible and his new interpretation of the true meaning of Christianity. He was 83 when in his last work, *The True Christian Religion*, he summarized his thought in a most succinct manner.

In what amounts to an afterword to *The True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg tells of the events in the heavenly realm that constituted the founding of the new Church:

After the completion of this book, the Lord called together His twelve disciples, who had followed Him in the world; and a day later He sent them all forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel, that the Lord God Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever, as foretold by Daniel (7:13, 14) and in Revelation (11:15): Blessed are they who come to the wedding supper of the Lamb Rev. 19:9. This happened on the nineteenth of June in the year 1770. This was meant by the Lord’s saying: He will send his angels, and they will gather together His chosen people from the bounds of the heavens on one side as far as the bounds of the heavens on the other. Matt. 24:31.

This new calling and commissioning of the original 12 apostles is the event from which the members of the several ecclesiastical organizations that follow Swedenborg’s teachings now date their beginning. A visible Church of the New Jerusalem would not be formed until after Swedenborg’s death, when some followers in England came together. From the original organization, the movement would spread internationally and eventually be organized in Sweden. The Church of the New Jerusalem was the first new church to be organized in the United States after the American Revolution.

Swedenborgians also consider June 19, 1770, to be the culmination of the Lord’s Second Coming (as represented in the revelations given to Swedenborg), his judgment on the fallen Christian Church, and the initiation of a church that will become the crown of all the Christian denominations that have previously appeared.

Different New Church congregations will celebrate June 19 more or less elaborately. Some will have programs that feature drama, music, and one or more of the films that have been made about Swedenborg and spread events out over several days, or simply remember the founding events with a worship service.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); White Lotus Day (Theosophy).

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New Year's Day

Most contemporary religions operate on a calendar based on the annual circulation of the Earth around the sun (Islam being a prominent exception), have designated a beginning point from which to measure that circulation, and acknowledge a New Year's Day (Christianity being a prominent exception). For most religious communities, the New Year begins on either January 1 of the Common Era calendar or the vernal or spring equinox. In the ancient world, the winter and summer solstices and the spring and fall equinoxes were among the most well-known astronomical events.

Some ancient calendars, such as the Babylonian, used the vernal equinox to mark the New Year. The Babylonians invented the zodiac and calculated the movement of the sun through its 12 signs. They passed this system to the Chaldeans and Assyrians and on to Egypt. The Hebrews were influenced by the Babylonian calendar during the years of captivity when they picked up the Babylonian days of the months and moved their New Year's celebration (Rosh Hashanah) to the fall. Rosh Hashanah actually falls on Tishri 1, the first day of the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar, the first month (Nissan) coming in the spring. Rosh Hashanah is a prescribed day of rest, like the Sabbath. Its exact date relative to the Common Era calendar varies from year to year, and also must not fall on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday.

Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE) revised the Roman calendar as a strictly solar calendar, established January 1 as the beginning of the New Year and ensured the beginning of spring (i.e., the spring equinox) always occurs in March. These structures were carried forward in the Gregorian reforms and are maintained in our Common Era calendar today.

The Christian Church adopted the Julian calendar as its official calendar at the Council of Nicea in 324 CE. January 1 was not a particularly significant date on the annual liturgical calendar, though once the date of Jesus's birth was set as December 25, the New Year was acknowledged as the date of the Feast of the Circumcision. It was assumed that in Hebrew society, the circumcision of males would be held on the eighth day after birth. The Feast of the Circumcision (now known as the Feast of the Solemnity of Mary) is somewhat lost, falling as it does between Christmas and Epiphany (January 6). That fact, along with the

downplaying of the liturgical calendar in general in Protestant circles, has contributed greatly to the almost complete secularization of New Year's Day in the Christian West. One exception is the festival to Bom Jesus dos Navegantes (Good Jesus of Boatmen) that occurs in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Jesus is honored with a New Year's Day Catholic Mass and maritime procession in which the seafaring families of the town ask for divine protection.

New Year's Day in Ethiopia is called Enkutatash, and is celebrated on Meskerem 1, the first day of the first month of the Ethiopian calendar (either September 11 or 12 on the Common Era calendar). Enkutatash celebrates the return of the queen of Sheba from her journey to Jerusalem to visit the Hebrew king Solomon (I Kings 10). Her courtiers in Ethiopia welcomed her home by making an offering of jewels to replenish her spent treasury. This day also marks the end of the rainy season in the country. It is celebrated throughout the country, though most notably on Mount Entoto. Here, Emperor Menelik II (1844–1913) erected his palace, looking out over his new capital, Addis Ababa. Mount Entoto is also home to many monasteries, and is considered a sacred mountain by members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Chinese New Year's Day

While as in the West, the Chinese New Year's celebration has largely become a secular affair, it still retails elements of its religious past in Chinese traditional religion. It is celebrated on the first day of the first month of the Chinese lunar year and has always been a joyful event marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring. That date appears to have been largely set during the Han dynasty (221–206 BCE), which adopted the Taichu calendar that set the first day of the year across the land. Some elements of the festival—staying up all night on New Year's Eve, the lighting of lanterns and fireworks, the drinking of wine—also began to spread at this time. During the Tang dynasty (618–907), the focus of the festival gradually shifted from protecting one's self from ghosts and demons, to enjoying life and expecting good in the year ahead. The celebration took on a lighter, more joyful tone. In later dynasties, more ritualized aspects of the celebration were added, and the variety of entertainments—including lion dancing, dragon dancing, and boat races—were significantly increased. In many places, visits to the temple of the local deity became part of the day's activity.

The New Year's Day festivities have become the most important and celebrated holiday in both China and the Chinese diaspora. Preparation will begin as much as a week ahead of time. Those who have moved to the city in the last few decades will return to their rural home and extended family. The celebration that begins on New Year's Eve may last for a few days or stretch for as long as two weeks. In fact, preparation will have begun during the 12th month of the lunar year with the Laba (Lantern) and New Year Preliminary Festivals (Small New Year), built around the Kitchen God. It was also a time for spring cleaning.

On New Year's Eve, the family will gather and seal the door of their home with red paper, to prevent their good fortune from escaping. They will offer food to the deities on their home altar and pay respects to their ancestors. They will rise early on New Year's Day and remove the paper around the door as it is time to welcome the good fortune of the New Year into their homes. The welcoming is accompanied by firecrackers.

At this time, one would encounter a variety of decorations carrying various forms of well wishes for the coming year. Written on strips of paper, they would be displayed in front of shops and on the doors of homes. The front gates of homes might also have pictures of two guardians and a tiger. This practice is derived from an old Taoist story in which two brothers fought demons and fed them to the tigers, believed to be the enemy of evil spirits and any who would harm the deceased.

New Year's Day is also a time to indulge in food. Enough for everyone for several days will have been prepared ahead of time. One popular practice was to place coins in dumplings (amid the meat dumplings), and being served such a dumpling would be considered a sign of coming good luck. Presents may be exchanged.

In both China and Taiwan, the secularization of the holiday and the following of practices of the traditional culture without taking note of the spiritual reasons that lie behind them has become the norm. A most important sign of the transformation is the opening of retail businesses so that holiday goers may spend New Year's Day shopping.

Islamic New Year's

Islam follows a lunar calendar of 354 days, which means that relative to the Common Era calendar, the next year will begin 11 days earlier each year. The Islamic New Year (Maal Hijra) is celebrated on the first day of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar).

New Year's is approached as a time for quiet and sober reflection. There are special prayers for the occasion, which will be repeated by those who gather at a mosque. For Sunni Muslims, possibly the most important activity is to repeat the story of the Prophet Muhammad's *hijra* (the flight from Mecca to Medina in 622), and to reflect upon one's life and moral state.

For Shi'a Muslims, New Year's Day has a completely different meaning. It marks the beginning of the 10-day Remembrance of Muharram, when Shi'a Muslims recall the Battle of Karbala and mourn the death of Imam Ḥusayn ibn Ali, Muhammad's grandson, at the hands of the army of the Sunni Muslim caliph Yazid I. The time of mourning culminates on the 10th day, the holy day called Ashura, the anniversary of the actual day of the battle. During this period, people will gather in mosques for the reenactment of scenes of the Battle of Karbala. Women will wear black. Groups will begin to construct a replica of Ḥusayn's tomb that will later be carried through the street in a procession led by a horse, recalling Ḥusayn's horse, Dul Dul.

Bahá'í New Year's

The Bahá'í Faith has published its own calendar, which operates within its community for scheduling religious events. It is built around 19 months of 19 days each, plus additional days to keep it aligned to the Common Era calendar. The first day of the year on the Bahá'í calendar is always March 21, thus placing it on the spring equinox, even if in any given year, the exact equinox occurs on March 20 or 22. Traditionally, the Persian (Zoroastrian) calendar begins the year on March 21.

The Bahá'í New Year's Day is termed Naw-Rúz (a name meaning “new day” taken from the same day in the Persian calendar). It marks the end of the annual 19-day month of Alá, which is a time for fasting, and is celebrated with a banquet feast. It is also one of the nine holy days of the year when work and school are suspended.

Indian New Year's

In 1957, the Indian government introduced the new Saka calendar, a solar calendar that corresponds in many ways with the Common Era calendar, but begins on the day after the vernal equinox, on the first day of the month of Chaitra. That day is usually March 22, but will be March 21 during a leap year. Many Hindus focus upon Brahma, the Creator, on this day as they believe that he began creating the world on this day.

India is a relatively new country, having been created by the British as it brought the many states of the Indian subcontinent under a single colonial regime. The various states retain ancient languages and customs, and, in places, their own calendars. In most states of modern India, there are local celebrations of New Year's Day, and the majority of these fall on the first day of the month of Chaitra. Among the different New Year's Days is Puthandu, celebrated as New Year's Day in Tamil Nadu. Puthandu is observed on the first day of the month of Chithirai in the Tamil calendar (April 13 or 14). Celebrating New Year's on April 13–14 is also the traditional way in Nepal and the Indian states of Kerala, Orissa, and West Bengal.

Sikh New Year's Day

Among the Sikhs, New Year's Day continues an old harvest festival in the Punjab called Baisakhi or Vasakhi, which happens to fall on April 13–14 in the Common Era calendar. This day attained a heightened meaning for Sikhs as one of their gurus, Gobind Singh, created the Khalsa, the collective body of all Sikhs, on this day by performing the Amrit (baptism) ceremony in 1699. Traditionally, for 48 hours prior to the beginning of the day, a continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib is held, and the morning of Baisakhi begins with a completion ceremony. The gathered congregation then sings divine hymns and listened to discourses on the importance of Baisakhi. It is a day for those wish to identify with the Sikh community to take Amrit. Following the activities at the gurdwara, all will engage in a wide variety of *sewa* (religious work).

Other Religions

Most newer religions, those formed in the 19th and 20th centuries, have adopted the dominant calendar in the place of their origin, and only a few have engaged in any attempt to create a new calendar for the special use their group. For most new religions, January 1 on the Common Era calendar is their New Year's Day, though they might attempt to give the day new significance or involve members in special activities. Various religious groups will take advantage of the general holiday spirit during the period (including released time from work and suspension of school activities) from Christmas to New Year's Day in many Western countries to hold retreats, seminars, and other events for their members. Every year, a few days before New Year's Day, the Church of Scientology organizes a gathering of church member in a large auditorium in the Los Angeles area at which the year, especially the accomplishments of the organization, are reviewed and celebrated, and goals for the future projected. This event is recorded and then sent to all the churches worldwide so that it might be shown as gatherings to be held on New Year's Eve.

Among the groups proposing a different New Year's Day are the Wiccans and Neo-Pagans. They build their year around eight evenly placed high holidays—the summer and winter solstices, the spring and fall equinoxes, and four holidays halfway between the equinoxes and solstices. Samhain (summer's end) occurs on October 31, halfway between the fall equinox and winter solstice. It traditionally marks the end of the harvest season, though few modern Wiccans/Pagans engage in agriculture or even reside in rural areas, and hence they have come to emphasize the day as a festival for the deceased. In Samhain gatherings, those who have died in the year previous are acknowledged, and contact with the spirit world is attempted. It is believed that the veil between this world and the next is thinnest on the evening of Samhain.

Many scholars believe that Samhain was the beginning of the Celtic year, and modern Wiccan/Pagans have picked up that idea, along with the convergence of Samhain with the Christian celebration of All Saints Day (November 1) and All Saints Eve or Halloween (October 31).

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See also All Saints Day; Ashura; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Calendars, Religious; Chinese New Year's (Preliminary tsagaan Festival); Chinese New Year's Day; Christmas; Epiphany; Fall Equinox; Halloween; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; New Year's Day (India); New Year's Day (Jain); New Year's Eve (Scientology); Nowruz; Rosh Hashanah; Samhain; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Tsagaan Sar; Wicca/Neo-Paganism Liturgical Calendar; Winter Solstice; Zoroastrianism.

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New Year's Day (India)

Following the gaining of independence in India in 1947, the new government encountered the variety of local calendars that continued in use from the distant past through the era of both Muslim rule and British colonialism. India subsequently established a program of calendar reform that led to the production and promulgation of a modern solar calendar that in many ways followed the Common Era calendar, but differs at two significant points.

The new calendar, called the Saka calendar, places New Year's Day on the vernal (spring) equinox—Chaitra 1 (March 21 or 22 on the Common Era calendar). This day, however, is not an important date in the annual cycle of festival in the country, as the celebration of New Year's Day continues to be marked by the various religious calendars still in use at the local levels. The Saka calendar also chose a uniquely Indian date to begin its numbering of years.

The Saka calendar remains the official calendar for all government business in India and the several official Indian holidays such as Independence Day and Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. News media usually operate from both the Saka calendar and the Common Era calendar. The 12 months of the Saka calendar are: (1) Chaitra, (2) Vaishakh, (3) Jyaishta, (4) Ashadha, (5) Shrawana, (6) Bhadrapad, (7) Ashwin, (8) Kartik, (9) Agrahayana, (10) Paush, (11) Magh, and (12) Phalgun.

Along with the Saka calendar, the Indian calendar reform committee also introduced a new religious calendar by which Hindu festival days could be calculated in a way both related to and separate from the new secular Saka calendar. The religious calendar includes twelve 30-day lunar months (that have the same names as the solar-based Saka calendar). The month is named for the solar month in which

the new moon occurs. Should two new moons occur in the same solar month, a 13th month is added and the name of the previous month is repeated. Previously, lunar months were reckoned from new moon to new moon in southern India and from full moon to full moon elsewhere. In the reformed calendar, lunar months are measured from new moon to new moon. Days also begin at sunrise rather than midnight.

A factor in the calculation of the religious calendar over against the Saka calendar is Hindu astrology. Astrologers generally begin the year on the vernal equinox, which is also the date that the sun is deemed to enter into the constellation of Aries. Because of a phenomenon known as the procession of the equinoxes, the sun's entry into Aries has drifted as millennia have passed. It is also calculated differently in Western and Hindu astrology. Thus in Hindu astrology, the vernal equinox is now calculated to fall on April 14. As the beginning of the new year, this day is celebrated under a number of names (and with a variety of local customs) such as Gudhi Padwa (Maharashtra), Samvatsar Padvo (Goa), Yugadi (Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh), Nav Varsha Samvat (across North India in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh), Nau Roz (Kashmir), Naba Barsha (Bengal), Goru Bihu (Assam), Puthandu (Tamil Nadu), and Vishu (Kerala). Baisakhi, the Sikh New Year, is celebrated in the Punjab on April 13.

Puthandu, the Tamil New Year's Day, falls on April 14. It is celebrated in Tamil Nadu, and by the many Tamils now residing in Pondicherry, Sri Lanka, in Malaysia, Singapore, Reunion Island, and Mauritius. Traditionally, New Year's Day is a time for feasting and for a car festival. The name does not refer to top modern automobiles, but to the large, highly decorated chariots used as platforms to pull the statues of deities from the local temples through the streets in a procession. Most of the larger temples throughout the region own chariots and bring them out each New Year's Day.

The government of Tamil Nadu created considerable controversy in 2008 by passing a measure that would change New Year's Day to January, a date coinciding with the harvest festival of Pongal. This proposal met with considerable resistance and had no effect outside of Tamil Nadu, where it had been ignored. Responding to the resistance, the government proposed to continue the April 14 celebration under the name "Chithirai Tirunal" (or the festival of Chithirai), and has been continued as a public holiday to honor B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), an Indian statesman known for his fighting the Hindu caste system, who happened to be born on April 14.

Bengalis also acknowledge April 14 as Poyela Boishakh, the first day of the Bengali, which is widely celebrated across the Indian states of Bengal, West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, the country of Bangladesh, and among the Bengali diaspora worldwide. The Bengali holiday is tied to the advent of Muslim rule and the imposition of the lunar calendar. The day for tax collection would vary annually and soon moved out of synchronization with the harvest season. To

accommodate farmers, the ruler Akbar (1542–1605) commissioned a new calendar that began on April 14. Introduced in 1584, it was backdated to commemorate Akbar's ascension to the throne in 1556.

The people of south central India, namely the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, and Maharashtra (which are located between the Vindhya and Kaveri rivers) follow a lunar calendar that begins with the new moon of the Indian month of Chaitra (and hence will vary through late March and early April from year to year). Called Yugadi or Ugadi, the celebration usually includes a gathering of extended families and a large feast. Among the Telugu-speaking peoples, the day begins with a ritual bath followed by prayers. The meal includes the eating of six foods that have six distinct tastes, each representative of the different realities experienced through life (sadness, happiness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise). This is also a day for reading from the *panchangam*, a Hindu astrological text that offers reflections on the future, specifically the coming year. Entertainment is provided by performances of the traditional Carnatic music of the region commonly held in the evenings.

The Telugu-speaking people of Andhra Pradesh see Ugadi as the day that Brahma created the world as well as the day that Vishnu incarnated as Matsya (in the form of a fish).

Holding a vastly different New Year's Day celebration are the people of Gujarat in western India. Here, Nutan Varsh or New Year's Day is celebrated on the day after Diwali, the first day of the month of Kartika, generally in late October or early November on the Common Era calendar. This day is also the first day of the year for members of the Swaminarayan movement.

Among the tales told during the celebration of New Year's Day in the month of Kartika is a story of the god Vishnu, who during his incarnation as Lord Vaman requested the equivalent of three strides of land from the demon Bali Raja. Bali Raja responded by offering everything he had. Lord Vaman was pleased by his devotion and designated the day as Balipratipada. It is therefore a day to offer worship (pujas) to Bali Raja.

Another story relates Nutan Varsh to the harvest time. The story is told that the deity Krishna, during his earthly incarnation at Gokul, questioned the offering of food to Indra, the king of the gods and lord of Heaven, since he sent the rain. Krishna observed that both human happiness and misery are really based on the accumulation of karmas. The Supreme Soul, or Brahman, gives the fruits of the lands according to one's karmas. Krishna advised offering the food previously given to Indra to the cows and the local mountain, Govardhan (or Annahut). Enraged, Indra poured rain on the people of Gokul. Krishna responded by raising the mountain to protect the people.

Swaminarayan adherents celebrate this day by preparing elaborate vegetarian feasts as an offering to Annahut. The largest of these are held at the temple in London.

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See also Common Era Calendar; Diwali; Kartika Purnima; New Year's Day; New Year's Day (Jain).

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New Year's Day (Jain)

For Jains, the New Year begins on the first day of the Hindu month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar). This day occurs in the midst of the Hindu celebration of Diwali, which many Hindus think of as the beginning of the new year, although their calendar now begins on the spring equinox. For Jains, Diwali is celebrated on the last day of the month of Ashwin (September–October) and marks the day that Mahavira, their founder, achieved *moksha* or salvation (and passed from his earthly life). The Jain New Year's Day celebration occurs on the following day (still during the Hindu Diwali celebration).

On New Year's Day, Jains will gather in the temple and, following their standard purification ritual, will perform the Snatra Puja ritual, the purpose being to comprehend and worship the virtuous attributes of the Jineshwar (the 24 Tirthankars or saints who are seen as the founders of the religion). The last in the lineage of Tirthankars was Mahavira.

Their ritual also directs the believer to remember to conduct their daily life with the same virtuous attributes, which may be summarized as holding a right view, having right knowledge, following right action or conduct, and attaining austerity in abstaining from lusts and desires with the goal of reaching equilibrium and tranquility. Gaining these attributes will lead to salvation. While they form the essential path adopted by a Jain nun or monk, they may also be integrated into the life of the average Jain lay believer.

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See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Diwali; Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mauna Agyaras; Mahavir Jayanti; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day; New Year's Day (India); Paryushana; Paush Dashami.

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New Year's Eve (Scientology) (December 31)

New Year's Eve has emerged as a major point of celebration for Scientologists, and all of its local churches hold festive New Year's Eve celebrations. The celebration will actually begin a few days after Christmas, when a large New Year's Eve gathering will be held in Los Angeles, California, where many of the church's international leadership resides. This gathering will review and celebrate the accomplishments of the past year and project goals and dreams for the next year.

This will be a time to release new editions (often in new formats) of the writings of church founder L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), and church leaders will acknowledge individuals especially noteworthy for assisting new church members progress with their appropriation of Scientology.

The event in Los Angeles is then recorded, duplicated, and disseminated to all of the local Scientology churches around the world, each of which organizes a New Year's Eve gathering to which all members of the church are invited and at which the DVD of the Los Angeles gathering is shared. The local New Year's Eve events are actually on December 31.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Nichiren's Birthday (February 12)

Nichiren was a Japanese Buddhist prophet whose career led to the formation of a set of Buddhist groups based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, considered to be the epitome of Buddhist scriptures. Members of the several groups practice the regular daily chanting of the phrase “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (Myoho-renge-kyo being the title of the Lotus Sutra) out of the belief that the phrase represents the essence of the teaching of the sutra. Nichiren also embodied that essence in a mandala called the Gohonzon. Chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra with faith in the Gohonzon is believed to enable people in the present age to attain Buddhahood.

Nichiren was born in 1222. In 1233, he entered a Tendai Buddhist temple and began a broad study of the Buddhist sutra (holy texts believed to have been authored by the Buddha). Over the years, he became convinced that the highest of the Buddha's teachings were to be found in the Lotus Sutra, and he assigned

himself the task of declare the sutra's supremacy and exposing the misconceptions of the various existing Buddhist schools. He adopted the name by which he is now known, Nichiren or Sun Lotus.

His direct and forceful style brought him followers but also opposition from both other Buddhist groups and the secular authorities. He was on several occasions attacked and exiled from his home in Kamakura, then the capital of the Shogunate. On several occasions, he predicted evils falling on Japan unless the country aligned itself with his correct Buddhist teachings. During one of his periods in exile, he wrote most of the books he left for his disciples. He spent the last period of his life at Mount Minobu in Kai Province, lecturing on the Lotus Sutra and training his core disciples.

Shortly before his death, he assigned six senior priests the task of the propagation of what would be known as Nichiren Buddhism after his death. They would soon divide into two camps—the Nichiren-shu and the Nichiren Shoshu, the two primary Nichiren groups. Early in the 20th century, a lay educational organization called Soka Gakkai developed within the larger Nichiren Shoshu movement. It grew significantly in the decades immediately after World War II, spreading to every part of Japan and even building an affiliated political party. It followed the Japanese diaspora around the world, and though it eventually became independent of the Nichiren Shoshu organization, it would become a global organization and the single largest Buddhist group in many Western countries.

Nichiren's birthday is celebrated on February 16. Thought observed by all Nichiren Buddhists, its most visible celebration has been in the Soka Gakkai movement. Each year, Soka Gakkai centers in Japan and around the world hold special services commemorating Nichiren's life and work, expressing gratitude for his propagating of the true highest teachings of Buddhism. Such services are occasions for group chanting of "Nam-myoho-enge-kyo," talks on the significance of Nichiren, testimonies of benefits derived from chanting, and entertainment. In addition to commemorating Nichiren, the Soka Gakkai also sponsor a two-day fall event held on November 20–22, called Nichiren Daishōnin Gotai-e (or more informally, *Oeshiki*), memorial services that commemorate the life and teachings of Nichiren.

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See also Oeshiki.

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Nicholas, Saint's Day of St. (December 6)

As with many saints, we know very little of Saint Nicholas (d. 343?). Modern scholars are even hesitant about the few biographical details accepted by many Eastern Orthodox scholars. They see him as having been born during the third century CE in the village of Patara, in what was a Greek area on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. From well-to-do Christian parents, he was orphaned as a youth. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made while still a young man. He studied for the priesthood, was ordained, and due to his piety, was selected as the bishop of Myra. This would have been at a time when the church was still a somewhat clandestine organization, and in the persecution of the church under the emperor Diocletian (303–304 CE), he was forced into exile. He seems to have survived and attended the Council of Nicea in 324 and to have died several decades later. December 6, 343 CE is generally accepted as his death date.

Legends and stories of miracles related to Bishop Nicholas emerged almost immediately. It was claimed, for example, that an unknown substance had condensed on his gravesite in the cathedral. The most repeated story tells of a poor man with three daughters. Without a dowry, the women's future seemed in jeopardy. Their father was tempted to sell them into slavery or prostitution. Then, mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold was tossed through an open window, the man eventually learned that Nicholas had given him the gold, but was sworn to secrecy. This story became but one of those told that associated Nicholas with gift giving. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for Saint Nicholas, and why Saint Nicholas is a gift giver. So many miracles were attributed to him that the Eastern churches began to refer to him as Saint Nicholas the Wonder Worker.

In 1087, for more or less altruistic reasons, the remains and relics of Nicholas were removed from his resting place in Myra, and taken to Bari, in southern Italy. Generally, the rationale for the movement of the saint's relics was based on the instability of the region and the fears that Christian pilgrims would be blocked from visiting Myra. Meanwhile, back in Bari, a huge basilica in Nicholas's honor was constructed.

The move to Bari did nothing to slow down the spread of the legend of Saint Nicholas, nor of the traditions of giving gifts on his feast day (December 6) that developed in hundreds of variations. Saint Nicholas' Day would become November 19 on the Gregorian calendar and then the gift giving transferred to Christmas (December 25) and Epiphany (January 6) and tied to the gifts brought by the Three Magi to the Christ child.

Today, Saint Nicholas, the fourth-century bishop, is most honored by the Greek Orthodox Church, where its annual celebration merges with the recognition of him

as the patron saint of the country. There is an equal intensity in celebrating his life in Russia, where he is also been designated the patron saint of the country, and where his name appears frequently in the liturgy quite apart from the special mention on December 6 (or December 19 according to the Gregorian calendar).

In Bari, Saint Nicholas is considered the city's patron, and an annual celebration, the *Festa di San Nicola*, is held there on May 7–9. As a part of that celebration, on May 8, a boat parade before the city is organized with the saint's relics being carried in the lead vessel. As part of the celebration, it is common for young brides in need of help before getting married to be given gifts.

There is a lesser tradition in Ireland that suggests that Saint Nicholas is actually buried in Jerpoint Abbey in Kilkenny. It is claimed by a few that after a stopover in Bari, the body was taken on to Ireland by one Nicholas de Frainet, a distant relative. The family then constructed a Cistercian abbey, appropriately named the church of Saint Nicholas. Today, residents show visitors the grave which they suggest holds the saint's remains. Celebration of this tradition is largely limited to an annual special Mass on the saint's day.

The celebration of Saint Nicholas' Day in the Netherlands, including Saint Nicholas' Eve (December 5), believed to be his birthday, has become important for the influence it has exerted. The celebration starts when Saint Nicholas (known as Sinterklaas) arrives in the Netherlands on a steamboat in late November. Young children put their shoes in front of the chimneys and look for a present the next morning. Then on the evening of December 5, brings presents to all. Sinterklass seems to be the direct ancestor of the North American Santa Claus.

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See also Advent; Christmas; Epiphany; World Peace Ceremony.

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A Bulgarian woman places flowers on an image of Saint Nicholas during mass in Sofia, Bulgaria, on the saint's feast day of December 6. (AP/Wide World Photos)

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Nine Emperor Gods, Festival of the

Among followers of traditional Chinese religion, the story is recounted of the Mother of the Big Dipper (*Dou Mu Yuan Jun*), who gave birth to nine children, each one identified as one of the seven stars of the constellation popularly known as the Big Dipper, plus two faint nearby stars. The Dipper mother is pictured as a woman with 16 arms in which she holds the sun and moon and a number of implements and weapons.

These nine deities were especially worshipped in the first nine days of the ninth month of the old Chinese lunar calendar (usually October on the Common Era calendar). This is a time for personal cleansing from any evil accumulated through the past year. Believers dressed in white and carrying candles and incense with them will launch the festival with a procession to the local body of water (river, lake, or ocean) to meet the deities and bring them back to their temple.

In Thailand, this time is called the Vegetarian Festival, and the primary rule for observance of the nine days is the adoption of a vegetarian diet. Meat is usually removed from the meals eaten by believers several days before the festival begins. The more energetic also climb local mountains. The nine days are filled with various rituals at the temple, during which some become possessed with the gods, and different forms of entertainment, all leading to the major celebration on the last day.

On the ninth day, the deities, which are said to reside on an urn with burning incense, are brought from the temple and the urn placed on a sedan chair. A great procession then begins back to the water. Leading the process are a group of boys, each carrying a banner. Then come a variety of performers—lion dancers, stilt walkers, and musicians playing gongs, drums, and cymbals. The believers will join in the procession carrying incense.

On the way to the water, the procession will pause for a priest and nun to bid the deities a proper farewell. Then the chair containing the urn is escorted to the water and placed on a boat, which the priest launches out to sea. Then the gods depart to return from whence they had come.

In China, this festival peaked in popularity during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and today mainly survives in Southeast Asia—in the Chinese communities

of Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore—where temples to the Mother of the Dipper and her nine star sons are still popular. The Dipper Mother is still worshipped in a few places in China, most notably at the White Cloud Temple in Beijing, but the most impressive festivals for her sons are found at such places as Phuket Island (Thailand); Penang, Butterworth, and Ampang (Malaysia); and Singapore.

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See also Double Ninth Festival; Pure Brightness Festival; Spring Dragon Festival.

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Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í)

Bahá'ís gather together once every 19 days to participate in their local communities' "Nineteen-Day Feast." To those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, this might seem like odd timing, but it is perfectly in keeping with the seasonal rhythm of the Bahá'í calendar of 19 months of 19 days. In the Bahá'í calendar, each day, month, year and cycle of years is named after a godly attribute that can be expressed as a goodly virtue. The Nineteen-Day Feast is at the heart of Bahá'í community life and is an essential feature of the "community building" that takes place in each local Bahá'í faith-community, which is typically defined by city/town boundaries. Unlike those religious "congregations," where believers choose the particular group with whom they wish to affiliate, Bahá'ís in a given town must learn to function together not as a congregation but as a community, both socially and for purposes of local administration. This structure is itself conducive to achieving the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith—to eliminate barriers and prejudices of all kinds, and to bring about unity through concerted action.

An integral part of the Bahá'í calendar, the first day of each Bahá'í month is often referred to as the "Feast Day." While the Nineteen-Day Feast is not one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is suspended, the Bahá'í Feast, informally at least, functions as though it were a "monthly" Bahá'í holy day. It is a time of worship, deliberation, and fellowship, as reflected in the three formal phases (i.e., devotional, consultative, and social) of each Bahá'í Feast comprising its spiritual, administrative, and unitive functions.

Historically, the Nineteen-Day Feast has its origins in the religion of the Báb (1819–1850), the herald and precursor of Bahá'u'lláh (1819–1892), the

prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith. In the *Arabic Bayán*, the Báb commanded his followers to invite 19 people every 19 days, even if one is able to offer only water in this offer of hospitality. Bahá'u'lláh ratified this practice in the Most Holy Book: “Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 40). Here, the primary purpose of the Feast is “to bind hearts together”—that is, to produce unity among the believers.

The term, “Feast” (Arabic, *díyáfat*) primarily means “hospitality” and has been used in connection with sacred events, such as the Lord’s Supper, portrayed in the Qur’an (Q. 5:112–15) as a banquet table descending from heaven, from which the disciples ate. “Feast” includes “both earthly and heavenly” food, with spiritual sustenance being the latter meaning. Thus, in current practice, refreshments are commonly served in the social portion of the Feast, after the spiritual enrichment of the devotional portion of Feast, consisting primarily of prayers and readings from the Bahá'í scriptures. In some Bahá'í communities, there may on occasion be a dinner (whether a “potluck” or provided by the host) that takes place before the formal Feast program begins.

The Nineteen-Day Feast was further developed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. During the time of the Báb and Baha'u'llah, the Feast was individually observed as the offer of hospitality to guests invited to the home. During the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, the Feast became communal in character and was essentially institutionalized. Of this development, Bahá'í historian Robert Stockman wrote:

In early 1905 Howard and Mary MacNutt and Julia Grundy attended a Feast hosted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Akka. The celebration included Bahá'ís from many parts of the world and was especially moving . . . The next morning at breakfast ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised the Feast, adding, “You must meet together in this way in America.” The three pilgrims took His exhortation as a commandment. After returning home Howard MacNutt consulted with the New York Board of Counsel and it organized the first real Feast known to have been held in North America. It occurred on 23 May 1905 in New York City. . . . Isabella Brittingham took the Feast to the rest of the United States. . . . In early 1906 she visited Johnstown, New York; Chicago; Kenosha; Racine; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; and Cleveland. In all of these cities she inaugurated the Feast as a formal community event. (Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900–1912*)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá stressed the devotional character of these gatherings and their unitive function in providing greater social cohesion among the Bahá'í faithful, and promised that “all its mystic meanings” would unfold in the faithful observance of the Bahá'í Feast (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 91).

Perhaps one of the mystical dimensions of Feast is the very real sense that the spirit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá may be present when true unity is experienced:

On that night thy house was the nest and the shelter of the birds of God. The divine melodies and the celestial lyres made that place a feast of heaven and an assembly of the Kingdom. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was present there in heart and soul and was joyful and happy. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 216)

Although no sacramental importance attaches to the Bahá'í Feast, 'Abdu'l-Bahá attached great importance to it and, in doing so, compared the Bahá'í Feast to the "Lord's Supper" among Christians:

Thou hast written concerning the Feast. This festivity, which is held on a day of the nineteen-day month, was established by His Holiness the Báb, and the Blessed Beauty directed, confirmed and warmly encouraged the holding of it. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance. You should unquestionably see to it with the greatest care, and make its value known, so that it may become solidly established on a permanent basis. Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.

If the Feast is befittingly held, in the manner described, then this supper will verily be the Lord's Supper, for its fruits will be the very fruits of that Supper, and its influence the same. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer, translated from the Persian, *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 425.)

The devotional portion of the Feast is often themed by the name of that particular Bahá'í month (i.e., "Honor," "Loftiness," "Power," "Mercy," etc.), although there is no requirement to do so. The devotions will consist of selected readings from Bahá'í sacred texts and the recitation or chanting of Bahá'í prayers (from memory or reading a Bahá'í prayer book). Music and singing may be included, and following the Bahá'í readings and prayers, creative or performative expressions of Bahá'í devotion may be integrated into the observance. Occasionally, passages from the scriptures of other world religions may be included in the Feast program. The Feast is the only Bahá'í event intended for the Bahá'í community alone other than elections, and thus not generally open, except that non-Bahá'ís who may be present will be treated cordially as guests, and consultation on sensitive community matters will be deferred.

Shoghi Effendi developed the administrative component by integrating into the institution of the Feast a period of consultation on the affairs of the Bahá'í community.

Thus the consultative part of the Feast is when announcements of upcoming events are made, community affairs are discussed, consultation on topics of special concern is facilitated, where ideas and recommendations for consideration by the local Bahá'í council (i.e., the annually elected, nine-member “Local Spiritual Assembly” or “LSA”) are offered and recorded. Such consultation gives every member a voice in community affairs and thus makes the Feast an “arena of democracy at the very root of society” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, August 27, 1989). Study topics of particular relevance may be presented for brief discussion for the community's edification, and the Bahá'í youth and children may be invited to perform or make special presentations. Thus, the consultative portion has an educative function in addition to its administrative purpose. It is also a venue in which the LSA may report its recent decisions to the Bahá'í community.

The social time of the Feast, which is typically at the end, is vital for promoting unity among the “Bahá'í friends” (as Bahá'ís are often called). Strength and vibrancy of the Bahá'í community is, after all, coefficient with its unity and solidarity. The vitality of social cohesion often manifests itself in the percentage of the enrolled Bahá'í members who participate in their community Feasts, and this, in turn, may have a direct impact on the level of giving to the Bahá'í Fund, to which only Bahá'ís may contribute.

The Bahá'í Faith has been established in every country except for the Vatican and North Korea, thus making it the second-most widespread religion in the world, next to Christianity. Today, the majority of the estimated six million Bahá'ís observe the Nineteen-Day Feast, which is an integral feature of Bahá'í community life. In some Muslim states in the Middle East, this practice has become restricted. For example, the Islamic Republic of Iran has banned the practice as part of a systematic campaign, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (and in earlier regimes), to eradicate the Bahá'í Faith in Iran.

The Nineteen-Day Feast is adaptable to a wide array of cultural contexts, which is an important feature, considering the fact that societies are becoming increasingly diverse. Music is often featured in the Feast program and typically reflects the Feast's geographic and cultural milieu. In the United States, for instance, the Feast might well feature upbeat gospel-style music, while Feasts in Bahá'í communities that are predominantly Native American, Native Canadian, or indigenous in Central and South America often incorporate cultural traditions as well; songs might be pentatonic in Bahá'í feasts in Asia. The Feast experience is further enriched by Bahá'í musicians around the world who, working in every genre and style and mixing them as well, set the Bahá'í writings to music, becoming a robust source of music not only for Feast, but for other Bahá'í devotional activities as well.

Ideally, the Nineteen-Day Feast operates to make each local Bahá'í community more tight-knit. This requires that the Bahá'ís themselves make it a priority and attach great importance to it. Although attendance at the Feast is not “obligatory” in the sense of being a Bahá'í law, and no one is pressured to attend, every Bahá'í should consider it a duty and privilege to be present at Feast. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said: “As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this feast be

held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world" (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 91).

Christopher Buck

See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Nino, Saint's Day of St. (January 14)

Nino (c. 296–c. 338), is part of a distinct minority of saints. She was a woman, she was an active missionary for the Christian movement, and she died of natural causes. She is also among the very few Orthodox saints remembered as "*isapostolos*" or equal to the apostles.

Nino, according to most traditional accounts, was from Cappadocia, an area now in central Turkey, and was a relative of George, the Roman soldier who became a Christian martyr and saint. It has been claimed that she was the daughter of the Roman general Zabulon and, on her mother's side, the niece of Houbnal I, the Christian patriarch of Jerusalem. He facilitated her trip to Rome during which she had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in which she was told to go to Iberia (i.e., ancient Georgia) and given a cross as a protective spiritual shield.

While on her way to Iberia, she became part of a community of 37 virgins that the beautiful Armenian Hripsime (or Rhipsime, d. c. 290 CE). They lived together under the leadership of a man named Gayane. When the Armenian king Tiridates III took

notice of them, all were killed save Nino. She escaped, some say due to the Virgin's protection, and went on to Georgia. Hripsime, who appears to have died a quite torturous death, would later be canonized as the first Armenian Christian martyr. Linking Nino to the story of Hripsime has a major problem in that the death of Gayane, Hripsime, and the other virgin occurred in the 290s, when if born, Nino would have been an infant.

Better documented is her entering Georgia around 320 CE, and making her way to Mtskheta (then the capital of Iberia). Iberians followed a Pagan religion heavily influenced by Persia. Upon hearing of Nino's arrival, Iberian queen Nana requested an audience with her.

Queen Nana, who at the time was quite ill, had her health restored under Nino's ministrations. She and some of the courtiers who were aware of her healing converted. These conversions brought a heated reaction from King Mirian who attempted to suppress the new faith in his realm. Then, as the story goes, he was struck blind during a hunting trip. He said a prayer to his wife's god, and his sight was restored. The miracle occasioned his conversion and he was subsequently baptized. In 327, he made Christianity the official religion of his kingdom. Georgians count their nation as the world's second Christian kingdom. King Miriam subsequently developed relations with the Byzantine Empire, and Constantine I sent priests and a bishop to Georgia. In 334 CE, the king ordered the construction of the first Christian church in Iberia on the site of the present Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta.

After the king's conversion and the national establishment of Christianity, Nino retired to a remote mountainous area at Bodbe, where she lived out her life as a hermit. A monastery was built at Bodbe, and her body was entombed there. A grapevine cross, a copy of the one given to Nino by the Virgin Mary, is now the symbol of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Saint Nino is also a saint recognized within the Armenian Apostolic Church (where she is known as Saint Nune). Roman Catholics list her feast day as December 15.

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See also George, Feast Day of St.; Lucy, Saint's Day of St.

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Nirjala Ekadashi

The 12 months of the Indian Hindu lunar calendar is divided into halves relative to the waxing and waning moon. The 11th day of the 24 half months is considered by Vaishnava Hindus as a day for fasting and offering puja worship to Lord Vishnu in the local temple. The most severe, and hence most holy, of the Ekadashi fast occurs during the waxing phase of the moon in the month of Jyestha (June on the Common Era calendar) It is thought to be the most beneficial of fasting days, and its proper observation is said to provide the fruits of all 24 fasts observed throughout the year.

This day is unique in that the fast includes refraining even from the consumption of water. It is a 24-hour fast, from sunrise to sunrise, and on the day before Nirjala Ekadashi, evening prayer is offered and only one meal is consumed. Vaishnava Hindus extol the fast, and note that observing it is considered equal to going on a pilgrimage. Vaishnavas also believe that after death, those who have observed Nirjala Ekadashi are received by messengers from Vaikunta, the mythical abode of Vishnu, rather than by Yama, the god of death.

Nirjala Ekadashi is one of the most popular and toughest Ekadashi fasting days. In 2010, the date of Nirjala Ekadashi is June 22. Ekadashi fasting is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and is observed on the 11th day of a fortnight in a traditional Hindu calendar. Nirjala Ekadashi is also known as Pandav Bhim Ekadashi fast. The difference from other Ekadashis and Nirjala is that devotees do not drink water on the day.

The Pandava brothers, the sons of Pandu, appear in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The five brothers—Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva—were each married to the same woman, Draupadi. They also fought together and won the Battle of Kurukshetra. According to the story, Bhima, the second of the Pandava brothers, wanted to observe the Ekadashi fasting but still eat food, a seeming contradiction. But fasting and eating were not possible. So the Sage Vyasa (the legendary author of the *Mahabharata*) advised Bhima to observe the Nirjala Ekadashi in the month of Jyeshtha since it has the benefit of observing all 24 ekadashis. Thus, Bhima attained the benefits of all the fasts from just observing the Nirjala (without water) Ekadashi.

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See also Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Mokshada Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Nirvana Day. See Nehan

Nityananda Trayodasi

Nityananda Trayodasi is the appearance day (or birthday) of Sri Nityananda Prabhu (b. c. 1474), the close associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), a 16th-century Bengalee saint revered for his effect in reviving bhakti yoga in eastern India. Chaitanya is considered to have been an incarnation of Krishna. Nityananda was such a close devotee of Chaitanya that he has been seen as an incarnation of Balarama, Krishna’s brother.

Nityananda was born in Ekacakra, a small village in what is now West Bengal. His birthplace, where a temple has been constructed, remains a popular pilgrimage site. As a child, he showed an unusual devotion to the deities and, at the age of 13, became a traveling companion of the sannyasin Lakshmipati Tirtha, which allowed him to meet a wide circle of Krishna devotees. He met Caitanya in 1506, their first greeting transforming into an intense spiritual encounter. He later became a major instrument in the revival movement through Bengal and Orissa that formed around Chaitanya.

Nityananda Trayodasi is celebrated during the waxing moon of the Hindu lunar month of Magha (January–February on the Common Era calendar). Members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness will fast until noon on this day, and their temples will be open for celebrants who wish to acknowledge Nityananda. Temple rituals will focus upon care for the statues of Chaitanya and Nityananda, song in their praise, and talks on their virtues.

Constance A. Jones

See also Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Appearance Day of; Gaura Purnima; Holi.

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Niwano, Nikkyo, Centennial of (2006)

Nikkyo Niwano, the cofounder and first president the Japanese Buddhist group Rissho Kosei Kai, was born in 1906. He moved from his childhood home in rural Japan to Tokyo as a young man and there encountered the Lotus Sutra, a Buddhist scripture believed to be a discourse of Gautama Buddha. Many Buddhists, especially those of the Nichiren tradition of Buddhism, believe the Lotus Sutra to be the epitome of the many writings attributed to the Buddha. In 1938, Niwano and

Mrs. Myoko Baganuma established Rissho Kosei Kai as a lay-led Buddhist organization devoted to serving people and promoting the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In the decades after World War II, the organization grew to include more than six million members spread across Japan, and developed followings throughout the Japanese diaspora communities around the world. Niwano led Rissho Kosei Kai for more than half a century, retiring in 1991. He passed away in 1999.

Though a firm believer in the Lotus Sutra, Niwano had concluded that all religions have a common root. He became active in interfaith work, throwing his energy into cooperative interreligious activities whose goal was world peace. He was one of the founders of the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace. The many awards he received for his work included the 1979 Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion and the 1993 Interfaith Medallion from the International Council of Christians and Jews.

In 1906, Rissho Kosei Kai devoted the year to a celebration of the centennial of their founder's birth. They engaged in a variety of activities including the renovation of the Great Sacred Hall and the opening of the Nikkyo Niwano Memorial Museum in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, both in Tokyo, and both targets of a variety of group pilgrimages. Growing out of the celebrations of Niwano's life, in 2007, Rissho Kosei Kai founded Kosei-kai International to launch a new long-term effort of the propagation of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Local chapters of the organization worldwide organized numerous activities built around either the Lotus Sutra or the cause of world peace. The Sri Lankan chapter, where a civil war has raged for several decades, for example, marked Niwano's birth centennial by holding an Inter Faith Peace Seminar. The New York Rissho Kosei Kai joined with the World Conference of Religions for Peace organized a symposium on the theme "A Life of Compassion and Peace."

J. Gordon Melton

See also Founders' Day, the Church of Perfect Liberty; World Peace and Prayer Day; World Peace Ceremony.

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Nossa Senhora dos Remédios, Pilgrimage of (September 8)

Among Portuguese-speaking Roman Catholics, devotion to the Virgin Mary as Nossa Senhora dos Remédios (Our Lady of Cures) is most popular, and prominent churches devoted to her may be found not only throughout Portugal, but in the Azores, Brazil, and even Gao, India. The faith will especially be found at these churches on January 6 (the feast of the Three Magi, or Epiphany) and September 8 (the feast of the nativity of Mary).

The most elaborate celebration of Our Lady of Cures occurs annually on September 7 and 8 at the Church of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios in Lamego, Portugal. The church is located on the Monte de Santo Estêvão, a hill adjacent to the town, and is reached by a staircase with almost 700 steps flanked by the Stations of the Cross representing Jesus's journey from his prison to his crucifixion.

As might be expected, pilgrims repair to Our Lady of Cures in search of healing and consolation. The Feast of the Nativity of Mary each fall provides the occasion for large numbers to engage in a set of activities celebrating the miracles that have come in answer to prayers directed to the Blessed Virgin.

Romaria de Nossa Senhora dos Remédios is an annual pilgrimage that makes its way to the shrine of Our Lady of Cures in Lamego, attracting those seeking cures for illness. For some, the staircase will be their primary vehicle for demonstrating their devotion, and many will move up the entire set of steps on their knees. The ascent is dotted with smaller devotional chapels, statues and fountains where people can rest. The highlight of the two days is the Triumph Processional that occurs on September 8. Led by a statue of Mary, it includes many different floats displaying scenes from the Bible and pulled along by oxen.

Other churches dedicated to Nossa Senhora dos Remédios also have pilgrimages and festivals. The church in Serta, Portugal, for example has a two-day festival on August 14 and 15. It grew out of the story of a nobleman who, after calling upon the Virgin, killed a large serpent. The meter-long jaw of the "serpent" is on display at the church. The church in Goa has a nine-day celebration each year that concludes on January 6 with a procession to the church and Mass.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany; Good Remedy, Feast of Our Lady of; Miracles, Feast of Our Lady of; Peace and Good Voyage, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Nowruz (March 21)

Nowruz, the Zoroastrian (ancient Persian/Iranian) New Year's Day, also begins the year for the people of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. It is also recognized by many in adjacent central Asian countries and the Kurdish people of Georgia, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The Iranian calendar originated with the development of a settled agricultural life in the region in the ancient past. Zoroastrians credit their founder Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) with improving the older calendar along with proclaiming the truths of the faith they profess. As the calendar finally evolved, it emerged as a strictly solar calendar with 12 months of 30 days, with an intercalation of five days, and a further addition of one day every four years. The calendar was supremely accurate for the time, as it was based on the regular reoccurrence of an annual astronomical event, the vernal equinox.

The spring equinox was an important celebrative occasion, as it signaled the change from winter to spring, with the cattle delivering their calves and plants springing forth. It brought the promise of future prosperity. The day coincided with New Year's on the Jewish and Babylonian calendars.

In the court of the Achaemenian king Darius the Great, who established his capital at Persepolis in 487 BCE, Nowruz was a great occasion opening two weeks of celebration. In the preceding month, 12 pillars representing the 12 months were erected. Seed were planted on the top of each pillar and over the next weeks created a green bonnet on each pillar.

On Nowruz, the king held a public audience that began with the High Priest presenting himself and bringing a formal greeting, to be followed by other officials, both secular and priestly. As each approached, presents were exchanged. The audience continued for five days and culminated on the sixth day, the Greater Nowruz, when the king formally received the royal family and the courtiers. Nowruz also included an amnesty for many held in the jails.

With the rise of Muslim rule in Iran and surrounding countries, the celebration of Nowruz has been simplified and is, of course, no longer tied to the activity of the ruler. Attention to it begins in the month preceding, with each Zoroastrian home receiving a thorough cleaning. Some 10 days prior to Nowruz, seeds of different plants are soaked and planted in various containers. In the next 10 days, they will sprout and grow to several inches.

In the home as Nowruz approached, a table is prepared with a copy of the Avesta, the Zoroastrian sacred text, a picture of Zarathustra, a mirror, candles, incense burner, bowl of water with live goldfish, colorfully painted boiled eggs, and the containers with the plant sprouts. There are also seven articles, each of which has a name that begins with an "s," and seven more that begin with an "sh" in the Persian language. The articles are prominently exhibited in small bowls on the table. The table is covered with a white cloth.

The table arrangement symbolizes the message, the messenger, and all the good things given by God to the people. As a part of the celebration, the children will repeat a recitation explaining the significance of each of the 14 “s” and “sh” objects. Thanksgiving is a theme running through the whole event. At the time of the vernal equinox, a special set of prayers are repeated and initial Happy Nowruz greetings offered to all, along with presents for the younger ones present.

Nowruz launches a week of visits with family and friends. The celebration culminates in March 26, when the birthday of the prophet Zarathustra is celebrated. Because of calendar differences, and the drift of New Year’s from the actual vernal equinox, many Zoroastrians now begin each New Year’s in August. They do, however, maintain a celebration around the vernal equinox, which allows the whole Zoroastrian community to maintain a certain unity.

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See also Fravardegan; Gahambars; Zarathustra, Commemorative Days of; Zoroastrianism.

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Nyepi

The Indonesian island of Bali is unique, an enclave of Hinduism in a country that is predominantly Muslim. It survives as a remnant of the old Hindu kingdom that once dominated Java and had its roots in the ancient faith of southern India. While much of Bali now operates out of the Common Era calendar, the religious community continues to use an older religious calendar that, unlike those found in India, begins at the spring equinox each year and includes 12 lunar months used to calculate holidays and celebrations of the various deities through the year.

Among the more unique holidays on Bali is Nyepi, the Balinese New Year, popularly known as the day of silence. It occurs on the new moon after the spring equinox. Nyepi day is based on an account of King Kaniska I of India, the beginning of whose reign in 78 CE is the base date for the ritual calendar. It was at this time that Aji Saka did and a missionary journey that led to the spread of Hinduism to Indonesia. Aji Saka also introduced the calendar that is still used.

People prepare for Nyepi day with the three days of Melasti to clean the deity statues, which will be taken in procession to a nearby source of water and lovingly

bathed before being returned to the temples. The day before Nyepi, there will be an exorcism ceremony at the main crossroads (where demons are known to gather) in the village. Participants will make images of monsters from bamboo, and these spirits will be exorcised to the accompaniment of Bleganjur, a Balinese gamelan music, and many expressions of delight. At the climax of the ceremony in the evening, the monsters are burned.

Nyepi day itself is observed by ceasing all normal activity and keeping a quiet day at home. Men especially appointed to keep the village secure, Pecalang, will wander around the village to stop any activities that would disturb people during the day. Traffic is at a minimum, the television is turned down, and no work is done. Sexual activity is discouraged. It is a day of contemplation. (While the tourist centers are exempt from the expectations of Nyepi celebration, even they will show a marked reduction in their activity levels.)

Ngembak Geni (the day after Nyepi) is a time for starting the New Year on a right course, visiting with family and friends, and asking and granting forgiveness where needed, and the reading of religious texts.

J. Gordon Melton

See also New Year's Day; New Year's Day (India); Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Obon Festival(s)

Obon is a Japanese Buddhist festival designed to honor one's deceased relatives. It is an additional holiday, along with Higan, at the time of the spring and fall equinoxes, and is similar to the Tomb-Sweeping Day (Pure Brightness Festival) in Chinese culture. Obon resonates with the older Chinese understanding of the seventh month of the lunar calendar as the month of the Hungry Ghosts, during which the spirits of the dead can wander the earth and interfere with human plans. As the seventh month climaxed, they celebrated a festival to placate the Hungry Ghosts, the spirits trapped in the hell realms.

The celebration of Obon was disrupted by the adoption of a Western calendar by the Shinto-based Meiji government in the 1870s. Obon had always been set by the lunar calendar, on the 15th day of the seventh month, which would place it in July or August on the Common Era calendar. Some people, primarily in rural areas, still follow the older calendar and celebrate the three days of what is known as Old Obon (or Kyu Bon) beginning on that day. The majority of the country celebrate Obon beginning on August 15 (or the week closest to that date), called Hachugatsu Bon. The remainder, which includes the residents of Tokyo, celebrate Shichigatsu Bon (or Bon in July) in the middle of July.

Obon is a time to reconnect with family, and many people will travel to the homes of relatives. One's own home will be cleaned and made presentable, in the understanding that the spirits of the deceased may visit during this time. Lights or lit lanterns may be placed near the entrance to one's home. Lanterns, placed near one's family shrine or at gravesites or placed on small boats and floated on local waterways, have given Obon a popular designation as the Lantern Festival.

Many Buddhists believe that spirits of the deceased may inhabit any of a number of heavenly or hellish realms, but may at various times return and make contact with the living. The Obon festival affirms the interdependence of the living with their ancestors, and offers appreciation for all that those who have gone before did for those now living. Its celebration aims at building a sense of gratitude in those still alive for all the contributions of one's ancestors. The Urabon service at the temple includes offerings to the Three Treasures (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) for the benefit of the deceased. That service is derived from the Urabon, or Service for the Deceased Sutra, in which Buddha advises one of his disciples to make an offering to the monks on behalf of his mother on the 15th day of the seventh month (which is toward the end of the Indian rainy season).



Awa Odori dancers perform during the Buddhist festival of Obon. (Willy Setiadi/Dreamstime.com)

In the modern world, Obon has become a time for large-scale celebrative activities. People will gather at Buddhist temples for daylong programs, one regular activity being the performances of a particular dance called the Bon Odori. Bon Odori appears to have been introduced in Hawaii in the first decade of the 20th century, and to have spread along the West Coast in the 1930s, after its introduction by a Jodo Shin-shu minister, Yoshio Iwanaga. In the West, Obon has become a popular time for a public festival to which non-Buddhist visitors are invited and the temple or other sponsor puts Japanese culture—art, folk dancing, music, food, sumo wrestling, martial disciplines, etc.—on display.

In the decades following World War II, American Jodo Shinshu temples, most of which are connected with the Buddhist Churches of America, included performances of Bon Odori (seen as folk dancing) in their Obon programs, while other temples and “churches” did not. This situation reverses what is found in Japan, where the various Jodo Shinshu groups have largely rejected Bon Odori as they reject the notion of spirits being able to return during Obon. By connecting Bon Odori with traditional culture, it has lost its significance as a statement about the souls of one’s ancestors for American believers.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Buddhist Churches of America Founding Day; Calendars, Religious; Higan; Pure Brightness Festival; Shinran Shonin, Birthday of; Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Oeshiki (October)

Oeshiki is a commemoration of the completion of the earthly life of Japanese Buddhist prophet Nichiren Shonin (1222–1282). He passed away in the residence of the Ikegami family, the lord of Ikegami, now in the Ota ward of Tokyo, on October 13, 1282. Soon afterward, Nikegami Honmon-ji Temple was established as a memorial. Nichiren is considered the founder of both the Nichiren-shu and Nichiren Shoshu sects of Japanese Buddhism. Oeshiki is celebrated across Japan and internationally by members of the spectrum of sects who trace their lineage to Nichiren, including Soka Gakkai International, the largest Nichiren group outside of Japan.

The most elaborate Oeshiki celebration is held at the Ikegami Honmon-ji Temple. It begins relatively calmly on October 11, with a simple memorial service. It then peaks on October 12 with the massive Mando-neri-kuyo parade, a procession through the streets from Ikegami Station to Honmon-ji Temple, which often attracts up to 300,000 observers. The parade itself includes some 3,000 participants, a number of whom pull the large floats, or *mandos*, pagoda-like structures decorated with lanterns and covered with paper cherry blossoms, which represent the oft-repeated Nichiren mantra “Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.” The event ends on October 13, with ringing of the temple bell, the method of originally announcing Nichiren’s death in 1282.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Higan; Nichiren’s Birthday.

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Olaf, Saint's Day of St. (July 29)

Norwegian king Olaf Haraldsson (995–1030) emerged out of obscurity in 1015, when he returned to Norway from England where he had led forces fighting the Danes. Gaining the support of a group of nobles, he declared himself king. He had some success in consolidating his kingdom, fighting off Danish forces and negotiating a treaty with the Swedes. He also continued the spread of Christianity in Norway begun by a predecessor, King Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995–1000). He brought bishops from England and Germany and funded the spread of the faith from the seaport cities to the interior. He also established the church as a legal entity and dictated its organization.

Olaf's kingship was brought to an end as a result of his losing the Battle of the Helgeå (1026). In 1029, the Norwegian nobles allied themselves to Cnut the Great, who invaded from Denmark. Olaf fled and, in spite of several attempts, was unable to regain his throne. He died in battle in 1030. The next year, one of the bishops Olaf had brought from England, Grimkel, declared him a saint. Grimkel also spread the veneration of Saint Olaf in England. Beginning with the rule of Olaf's illegitimate son Magnus (r. 1035–1047), subsequent Norwegian rulers played up the veneration of Olaf, in part to establish their own right to the throne. He was formally confirmed as a saint in Rome in 1888.

Olaf's remains now reside in the Nidaros Cathedral located in Trondheim, Norway, the country's most prominent pilgrimage site. Those wishing to make the pilgrimage may travel along Saint Olav's Way, which covers some 400 miles beginning in Oslo.

The veneration of Olaf was spread in the Eastern Church through the Varangians, a group of Scandinavians residing in Constantinople who served as the bodyguard of the Byzantine emperor. Their chapel was located near the church of Hagia Irene. Saint Olaf became the last saint whose veneration was common to both the Western and Eastern churches prior to the Great Schism of 1054. His feast day, also called Olsok Eve, is July 29. He is considered the patron saint of Norway, though the Faeroes Islands is the only nation that keeps his feast day as a national holiday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ansgar, Saint's Day of St.

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Olsok Eve. See Olaf, Saint's Day of St.

Omizutori. See Shuni-e (Omizutori)

Onam

Onam is the largest annual festival in the south Indian state of Kerala. It occurs during the month of Shravana on the Hindu lunar calendar (August or September on the Common Era calendar), though its observance is actually set annually on the local calendar of the Malayali people of Kerala.

Onam, an ancient rice harvest festival, is now tied to the story of King Mahabali as recounted in the epic Indian tale, the *Mahabharata*. Mahabali was a descendant of Kashyapa. Kashyapa fathered two sons, one of whom, Hiranyakashipu, attempted to kill his own son Prahalad. As he was attempting the evil deed, Vishnu, in his incarnation as Narasimha, stepped in and killed Hiranyakashipu. Mahabali was the grandson of Prahalad.

Meanwhile, Kashyapa's two wives had become the mothers of two rival sets of subdeities, known in Hinduism as the Asuras and Devas. The former are generally thought of in negative terms, but not always. Mahabali was an Asura and in his rise to power had defeated the Devas and taken possession of the three worlds over which they ruled. The Devas approached the deity Vishnu to seek his help in their ongoing battle with Mahabali. Vishnu refused to assist them in light of all the good things Mahabali had done since taking power.

Vishnu decided, however, to test Mahabali, who had established his capital in what is now Kerala. He chose a time when Mahabali was performing the sacrificial rites, during which Mahabali had declared he would grant all wishes presented to him. A small boy visited Mahabali at this time and asked for a piece of land measured by his taking three paces. The king immediately agreed. Unfortunately, when Vishnu took the first two paces he had already covered all the realms over which Mahabali ruled. Mahabali offered himself for the third pace, and the effect was his banishment into a land far away. Vishnu, impressed with Mahabali's devotion, granted him the boon of being able to revisit his former subjects once a year.

The time of Mahabali's rule in Kerala is remembered as a Golden Age; hence, his annual return visit, the subject of the Onam festival, is a time for widespread celebration. Highlights of the 10-day festival include the Onasadya feast, prepared on Thiruvonam, the last day when the spirit of the king is believed to be present. It is a large nine-course vegetarian meal that includes a number of prescribed dishes. The meal is served on banana leaves as celebrants sit on the floor on a mat.

The sacred Pampa River, considered by locals as their equivalent of the Ganges River, is the site of the annual Vallamkali, the Snake Boat Race, featuring large boats pulled by oarsmen whose activity in the water is observed by spectators on the river's banks cheering them on. On other days, men engage in a range of sports, while women test their grace in a range of dances.

Constance A. Jones

See also Narasimha Jayanti; Vamana Jayanti.

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Onbashira

Onbashira is a festival held at Suwa, Nagano, Japan, in order to symbolically renew Suwa Taisha, the Suwa Grand Shrine, the main temple in Japan dedicated to Suwa-no-Kami, a kami of valor and duty, a major deity in the Shinto divine hierarchy. The site is some 1,200 years old and now stands as one of the oldest shrines of Japanese Shinto. It is mentioned in the Kojiki, one of the Shinto holy books. The large shrine complex has four parts—the Kamisha (upper shrine), the Shimosha (lower shrine), the Harumiya (spring shrine), and the Akimiya (autumn shrine).

The Onbashira festival occurs every six years and appears to have been celebrated uninterrupted for as long as the shrine has existed. The festival takes place during the years of the Monkey and the Tiger, according to Chinese astrology. The festival takes several months, with the main parts being held in what is April and May on the Common Era calendar. There are essentially three stages to the event.

First, in the weeks leading up to the festival proper, 16 large trees are felled in a forest on the mountain above the shrine, using axes and other tools especially created for this event. Once on the ground, the trees are decorated with red and white ornaments, the traditional colors associated with Shinto, and ropes are attached to them. In April, the festival proper then begins. This segment, called Yamadashi, finds teams of loggers riding the logs down the mountainside to the shrine site. The trip not only strips the logs of their bark and branches, but the ride becomes a text of bravery for the men who ride the logs down what are often quite steep slopes.

In May, the last part of the festival, termed Satobiki, is centered on the placement of the new logs at the four corners of the four parts of the Suwa shrine. They are erected upright and are seen as pillars that serve as the foundational supports of the shrine. This placement is done with all due ceremony and ritual with a group of men who are atop each log as it is lifted into place and who celebrate its successful placement with songs. The completion of Onbashira is marked with a closing ritual called “Building of Hoden.”

Onbashira elicits heavy participation in its different stages from the people of Suwa and the surrounding region. Since the lifting of the pillars was integrated

into the opening ceremony of the Nagano Winter Olympic Games in 1998, hundreds of thousands of visitors have flocked to Suwa for subsequent staging of Onbashira.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Hakada Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Kyoto Gion Matsuri; Nagasaki Kunchi; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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One Great Hour of Sharing

One Great Hour of Sharing is a Protestant Christian commemoration that traces its roots to the various efforts launched after World War II for the reconstruction of Europe. Many church leaders took note of the 1946 call made by the newly elected presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Henry Knox Sherrill (1890–1980), to build the Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief. Speaking on a nationwide radio hookup, he challenged church members to raise one million dollars in one hour.

In 1949, church leaders from several denominations created an ad hoc committee to support the separate relief campaigns of their various churches. This united effort would serve not only to raise money, but to provide a witness to the effect of Christians uniting around a common cause. An initial effort was made around a dramatic radio presentation that involved several Hollywood stars, most notably Gregory Peck and Ida Lupino, and a greeting contributed by President Harry Truman. The program aired at 10 p.m. on Saturday evening, March 26. Listeners were asked to attend their local church the next day and make a contribution to the churches’ relief efforts. Some 75,000 local churches participated. A similar effort was made annually.

Meanwhile, in 1946, a number of the leading denominations united their relief efforts in forming Church World Service, which in 1950 would affiliate with the new National Council of Churches in the USA. As of 2010, 36 Protestant and Orthodox denominations cooperate through Church World Service, and each has its own relief appeal relative to the One Great Hour of Sharing. Of these, nine currently serve on the One Great Hour of Sharing committee and use the One Great

Hour of Sharing event to raise funds for their mutual relief efforts: American Baptist Churches USA, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Church of the Brethren, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and Church World Service. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) calls its offering the Week of Compassion. In various ways, all work in cooperation with Church World Service, the relief, development and refugee assistance arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

United Methodists, who support a massive relief program called the United Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief (UMCOR), use the One Great Hour of Sharing as the occasion to raise funds for their overhead, so that money given to appeals for special needs go entirely to the relief effort. The Presbyterian Church (USA) divides its One Great Hour of Sharing between three funds—The Presbyterian Hunger Program, the Self-Development of People, and the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Today, the different denominations celebrate the One Great Hour of Sharing on a variety of days and issue the funds raised in slightly different ways, though all designate their ultimate use to back efforts at disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development aid. Participating churches along with Church World Service have moved into the forefront as first responders to natural disasters.

J. Gordon Melton

See also World Communion Sunday.

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“The History of One Great Hour of Sharing.” *One Great Hour of Sharing*. Posted at <http://www.onegreathourofsharing.org/>. Accessed April 15, 2010. Most of the participating churches maintain separate “One Great Hour of Sharing” Web sites for their members and constituency.

Orthodoxy, Feast of

The Feast of Orthodoxy is a celebration of the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Eastern Rite Catholic churches that emerged out of the iconoclasm controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. At various times in the Middle East, voices have appeared who take the command against graven images to mean any kind of human representational art in the church context. Such iconoclasm became institutionalized in Islam. In the fourth century, the use of icons began to expand in the Christian Church in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Then, toward the end of the 820s, Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717–741), the Roman emperor in Constantinople, set of an empire-wide controversy by having an image of Jesus removed from the entrance to his palace. His action provoked a controversy that would last for a generation.

Finally, in 780, Empress Irene, who held power while her son, Emperor Constantine VI, was still a minor, directed a request to Pope Hadrian I (772–795) to convene a church council to deal with the issue. The council finally met at Nicea in 787. The assembled church leaders defended icons and other representational art as being true to the incarnation. They also drew the distinction between worship, whose only object is God, and the salutation and respectful veneration, which could be directed to the saints and to images such as icons.

The Nicean Council appeared to have definitively dealt with the issue. However, in the next century, a series of Roman emperors favored the iconoclasts, including Nikephoros I (r. 802–811), Leo V (r. 813–820), Michael II (r. 820–829), and Theophilos (r. 829–842). Finally, the young Michael III (842–867), again operating through his mother Theodora, who acted as the regent from 842 to 855, conferred with the future Patriarch Methodios (r. 843–847) to summon the Synod of Constantinople in 842. That synod reaffirmed the use of icons and culminated with a massive procession to the Hagia Sophia, the monumental Orthodox church in Constantinople, to restore them to their proper place in the church.

Before the Synod was dismissed, it further decreed that a feast should be celebrated each year on the anniversary of the restoration of the icons, and that feast should be named the Sunday of Orthodoxy. It continues to be celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The veneration of icons has subsequently become one of the most identifying characteristics of the Orthodox churches and from them was passed to the several Eastern-rite Catholic churches.

The Day or Feast of Orthodoxy continues to recall the victory over the iconoclasts, but as the iconoclasm controversy receded into the past, the days became a time to reaffirm the Orthodox position against the range of heresies that had been defined by the Seven Ecumenical Councils between 324 and 787. Most groups that have deviated from the Orthodox position in subsequent centuries have adopted and restated one of the early positions that were defined as heretical by the councils.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Czestochowa, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year.

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Osho (Rajneesh), Birthday of (December 11)

Osho (1931–1990), known for most of his teaching career as Acharya Rajneesh, was an Indian spiritual teacher who lived in the United States through the 1980s and 1990s. He developed a loyal following in the West that grew even as he became the subject of increasing controversy.

Osho was born Chandra Mohan Jain. He completed his advanced degrees and became a professor of philosophy. He then dropped his academic career in favor of becoming a roving teacher of an eclectic and revisionist form of Hinduism. He absorbed elements of the Western Human Potential movement and became known for his attacks on traditional institutionalized religion and his advocacy of liberal sexual mores. These came together as he initiated people into the renounced life (as *sannyasins*), traditionally a path that includes celibacy. His *neo-sannyasins* offended the Indians with their public displays of affection. In 1974, he settled in Poona and established an ashram where he often made news with his outrageous statements.

As tensions grew in India, in 1981, Rajneesh, as he was then known, moved to the United States and soon established the community of Rajneeshpuram, in rural Oregon. Controversy mounted over conflicts with the area's previous residents, soon outnumbered by the Rajneesh disciples; the guru's ostentation demonstrated in a collection of Rolls-Royce cars given to him by disciples; and the plan to build the community's population by inviting homeless people to move there.

The Rajneesh experiment came to an end when it became known that some of the leadership had been involved in a plot to poison the water in Portland, Oregon. Though he claimed ignorance about the plan, Osho (the name he adopted in the 1990s) was eventually arrested and deported. Denied entry in a number of countries, he reluctantly returned to India, where he died a short time later.

His following remained largely loyal to him. They have kept many of his books in print, continued to nurture an effort to reestablish his reputation as a forward-thinking teacher innocent of the crimes committed by some of his followers, and to maintain a global network of ashrams. The movement is not as strong as it was at its height in the mid-1990s, but it is far from defunct as some have reported.

Osho's followers honor their teacher on his birthday, December 11, every year, a practice that began while he was still alive (and accounted for many of the Rolls-Royces he owned). The many Osho centers and ashrams will hold a gathering that includes Osho meditations, lessons, dancing, and music. Attendees will also share a meal.

As early as 2002, the movement indicated that the celebration of the birthday may be coming to an end. No celebration was held at the movement's headquarters commune in Poona, India, following a decision to ignore it. This action followed removal of all the pictures of Osho that had previously been prominently displayed, and reflections by the leadership that they wished neither to make Osho

an object of veneration nor to institutionalize the movement into an organized religion.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

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Pak Tai, Birthday of

Pak Tai is a deity of traditional Chinese religion with a strong following in southeastern China, including Hong Kong and Macau. There are at least seven Pak Tai temples in Hong Kong. He is also known as Yuen Tin Sheung Tai (Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven).

Pak Tai was a real person, reputedly a prince of the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) who became a learned Taoist. The story of his life is, however, thoroughly infused with mythological elements. It seems that a demon was loose on the land. The Jade Emperor, a high Taoist deity, appointed Pak Tai the commander of 12 heavenly legions to defeat the demon, which had sought the assistance of a large tortoise and an even larger serpent in the battle. When he defeated the demon and returned to heaven, the Jade Emperor named him the Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven. His birthday is celebrated at the Pak Tai Festival, which falls on the third day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar (March–April on the Common Era calendar).

Veneration of Pak Tai emphasizes his power, courage, and devotion, but in Hong Kong he is primarily known as someone who can help avert disaster. He is usually portrayed in a sitting position with a serpent and tortoise under his feet. His presence in Hong Kong relates to his ascribed ability to stop the plague.

The largest temple to Pak Tai is found in the Wanchai section on Hong Kong Island, but the most famous temple is on the nearby island of Cheung Chau. Pak Tai was brought to Cheung Chau in the 18th century at a moment when the residents, mostly from the Huizhou area of Guangdong Province, were doubly beset by pirates and an epidemic of the plague. The community of fishermen brought a statue of Pak Tai they had found floating in the sea to the island and held a procession through the streets of the main village. In addition, residents dressed as different deities and walked around the island to drive away the spirits of the dead killed and buried on the island by the pirates. Their actions seem to have relieved the problems. The statue of Pak Tai stayed, and a temple was erected as its home.

Today, in addition to the celebration of Pak Tai's birthday, the temple on Cheung Chau holds a second festival on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month (April–May). It has grown into a weeklong event featuring a large process/parade with a number of floats, and a variety of productions of Cantonese opera. The three central days of the festival begin in front of the Pak Tai temple, where the priests hold their opening ritual and call for the residents to adopt a vegetarian diet in

the days ahead. The whole island joins in the spirit of the celebration, and even restaurants that normally serve meat conform to the vegetarian requirements.

The highlight of the festival is the celebration around the towers of buns held in Tung Wan, in the open space outside the temple. At the time that the ghosts of the deceased victims of the pirates were being dealt with, they were offered the buns, a traditional food to placate ghosts. Bakers prepare the buns and add a red-stamp message of good fortune. Humans are supposed to avoid eating the buns themselves until the ghosts have had their fill.

Today, three island associations share responsibility for planning the annual festival, and among themselves have a friendly competition to build a high tower, which will be covered in buns. On the third day of the festival, young people will climb the towers and retrieve the buns, which are distributed to the gathered festivalgoers.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Monkey King, Birthday of the; Tam Kung Festival; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter in the Christian liturgical calendar, celebrates Jesus's entry into Jerusalem which initiates the events of the last week of his life. It is an ambiguous day in the Christian year. On the one hand, it is celebrated as a time that Jesus was publically acknowledged as someone of importance, while on the other hand, the scene turns dark with his being challenged by Jewish leaders, his overthrowing the money changers in the temple, his cursing a fig tree, and his weeping for the city.

As the Gospel of Luke briefly recounts the story, the disciples are asked to locate a donkey on which Christ would ride.

And it came to pass, when he drew nigh unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go your way into the village over against you; in which as ye enter ye shall find a colt tied, whereon no man ever yet sat: loose him, and bring him. And if any one ask you, 'Why do ye loose him?' you will say, The Lord has need of him."

And they that were sent went away, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, "Why do you loose the colt?"

And they said, “The Lord has need of him.”

And they brought him to Jesus: and they threw their garments upon the colt, and set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their garments in the way. And as he was now drawing nigh, even at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen; saying, “Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” (Luke 19:29–38)



Believers and clergymen participate in a Palm Sunday procession in Portugal. (Graça Victoria/Dreamstime.com)

Palm Sunday was celebrated in the church during its early centuries, and became an open-air procession in the fourth century in Constantinople after the church attained legality and devel-

oped its ritual in the freedom provided by its being favored by the emperor. By the eighth century, the celebration had permeated the Christian community, both East and West. By the ninth century, in Rome, Palm Sunday had become a festive occasion that included the ritual blessing of the palms, and it continued to evolve through the Middle Ages, a high point being the wheeling of a statue of Jesus astride a donkey around the streets of the city.

In many ways, Palm Sunday is simply another Sunday in Lent for Western Christians, and it is followed by several days in which little is done liturgically. Observation of Holy Week then continues with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, during which Jesus observed the Last Supper, instituted the sacred meal later to become the Eucharist; was arrested; put through a mock trial; and executed by crucifixion. On the next Sunday, he was said to have risen from the grave by his followers.

In the Eastern Church, Palm Sunday is preceded by Lazarus Saturday, a day that celebrates the resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany, which occurred just before he headed for Jerusalem for Passover (John 11:1–45). Lazarus Saturday is a celebrative occasion that marks the transition from lent to Holy Week, and one of the very

few occasions in which the resurrection is the focus of worship on a day other than Sunday.

In the West, it has been the tradition to save the palms used on Palm Sunday, to bless them with holy water, and then to burn them. The ashes thus produced are then stored until Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) the next year, when they are used to mark the forehead of the attendees at that service.

Palm Sunday is among the most celebrated liturgical events among Protestant Christians, most of whom will emphasize it in their worship on the Sunday before Easter. There are a few denominations that do not observe any of the major Christian holidays, believing them to be later manmade traditions not called for in the Bible.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Good Friday; Holy Week; Lazarus Saturday; Lent; Liturgical Calendar—Western Christian; Maundy Thursday.

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Paranirvana Day. See Nehan

Parents Day

Parents Day is the first holy day to be celebrated in the Unification Church, founded by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920) in Korea in 1954. Parents Day was established on March 1, 1960 (and is now set annually by reference to the traditional Korean lunar calendar). It celebrates the establishment of Moon and his wife Hak Ja Han as the True Parents of humanity. Moon is known as True Father and his wife as True Mother.

Their parental role is based on a modification of traditional Christian doctrines about the fall and salvation of humans. According to Moon, the fall of Adam and Eve involved sexual transgression, first Eve with Lucifer and then Eve with her husband. This fall stained the human bloodline and brought ruination to the human family. God has been looking to restore humanity through a new Adam. Jesus was supposed to fulfill that role, but his own failings and those of his parents and John the Baptist led to a path of secondary salvation through Jesus’s death on the Cross.

Unificationists believe that Jesus appeared to Sun Myung Moon in 1935 and asked him to complete the liberation of the family. Moon claims to have achieved this as a result of his sinless life, persecution for righteousness, and choice of a new Eve to form the first True Parents in history. According to Unification theology, Moon's wedding in 1960 represents the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and the restoration of True Family.

Moon's children are known as True Children, and those who join the Unification Church are grafted into Moon's family so that his sinless lineage can form the proper base for a new world order. Moon said this of Parents Day in a 1963 sermon: "Parents Day is the first time since God created all things and humankind that there is one balanced man, one balanced woman, balanced in love, to whom God can descend and with whom He can truly be. For the first time in human history this original state of matrimony, the original trinity, has come into existence upon the earth."

Unificationists believe that Moon's children are born without sin. However, they have free will and can choose a path of rebellion against God. The same applies for any followers of True Parents: spiritual birth into the Moon family cleanses from sin, but the capacity for freedom to rebel remains. Obedience to Moon's teaching and example assures a path to earthly blessing and heavenly reward.

James A. Beverley

See also Children's Day; Day of All Things; True Parents' Birthday; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Parshurama Jayanti

Vaishnava Hindus who focus their religious life around the deity Vishnu tell the stories of his various incarnations—as for example, Rama or Krishna—and celebrate various important events relative to these incarnations. One of the lesser-known incarnations (for non-Hindus) is Vishnu's appearance as Parashurama, who is said to have appeared at one point as an axe-wielding man to correct the destruction being wrought by members of the warrior caste that had wrongfully usurped power over the Brahmins, the priestly leaders of the social order. At the moment of his birth, Parashurama was given his axe by the deity Shiva.

Many of the stories about Parashurama concern his father, Jamadagni. At one point, for example, Jamadagni, doubting the chastity of his wife, ordered his sons, one by one, to kill her. They refused, and the enraged Jamadagni slew them. He then turned to Parashurama, who obeyed his father. Pleased with his son's action, Jamadagni granted Parashurama any wish, and he asked that all who had been slain be returned to life, which was granted. Parashurama is thus seen as one demonstrating traditional obedience and affection.

The more famous story of Parashurama concerns his attack on the warrior caste. Kartavirya, a powerful king, coveted a cow possessed by Jamadagni and, at a time when Jamadagni was away from his home, took it. Jamadagni and his son pursued Kartavirya and retrieved the cow, and in the process killed the king. Upon hearing of their father's death, the king's sons killed Jamadagni. Ever the loving son, Parashurama swore death on all Kshatryas (the name generally given the warrior caste). This vow he fulfilled in a series of battles that followed.

As a result of Parashurama's action, in the future, the new warrior caste would all be descendants of the Brahmins, a status that manifested the superiority of the priestly caste over that of the warrior caste. The role of Parashurama in stabilizing the caste system and hence the Hindu social order is celebrated on what is designated as his birthday (jayanti), the third day of the waxing moon in the Hindu month of Vaisakha (which occurs in April or May of the Common Era calendar).

Those who fast, practice austerities, and/or offer pujas (worship) on this day are said to be granted Parashurama's virtues. Worship of Parashurama is especially found in Malabar and Konkan, where it is believed that he at one time saved these coastal regions by preventing the ocean from destroying them.

Constance A. Jones

See also Anant Chaturdashi; Janmashtami; Jhulan Yatra; Kartika Purnima; Rama Navani; Vamana Jayanti; Varaha Jayanti.

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Paryushana

Paryushana, also known as Daslakshan Parva or the Festival of Ten Virtues, is a primary festival among the Jains of India. Its origin lies in the beginning of Jainism itself, which emerged as an order of monks. Practicing a form of nonattachment, the monks traveled about living from day to day on what was offered them. India has a rainy season (roughly June to September on the Common Era calendar) in

which travel is difficult, and it became common for monks to settle down in one place, usually at the edge of a city, for several months (a minimum of 70 days).

In the old Indian lunar calendar, Paryushana would begin on the fifth day of the waxing moon (*shukla-paksha*) half of the month of Bhadrapad. It would last from 8 to 10 days, depending upon which of the two main divisions of the Jains were holding it. The Svetambaras hold an 8-day festival and the Digambaras a 10-day event.

The festival is a time for reflection on one's life and actions during the past year, and a time to renew one's focus on what are considered the 10 cardinal virtues: forgiveness, charity, simplicity, contentment, truthfulness, self-restraint, fasting, detachment, humility, and continence. These virtues are embedded in a game that is played during the week called Gyanbazi, a game of chance in which morality is taught and the goal becomes enlightenment. The game was observed by the British and brought back to the West where it was secularized and marketed as "snakes-and-ladders" and in the United States as "Chutes and Ladders."

The festival is marked by several events, including recitation of the text of the Kalpa Sutra, the book that includes the earliest accounts of the Tirthankaras, the enlightened masters from whose teachings Jainism derives. Fasting is common among the monks during this time, and many lay people, who already are vegetarians, deny themselves specific food items (much like Christians during Lent). The evening is spent in the practice of Pratikraman, a form of meditation that allows for stringent introspection, a review of one's life, a means of repentance for negative thoughts and actions, and a reminder not to repeat them.

There are several types of Pratikraman, one form of which is practiced daily by devout Jains. Other forms are undertaken once every 15 days or once every four months. Samvatsari Pratikraman is done once per year—on the last day of the Paryushana festival. In a sense, the first days of the Paryushana are meant to lead up to the last, during which a most unique practice accompanies the Pratikraman. Those at the event ask forgiveness of every individual they may have offended during the past year. This practice becomes a time to forget old differences and renew the community. It is accomplished by folding one's hands before the person and requesting "Micchamidukadam" (May my bad deeds toward you be fruitless).

A form of Paryushana has been imported to the West, though there are relatively few monks, and the Indian rainy season does not exist. Westerners attending the event have been especially impressed by the acts of forgiveness on its final day.

Constance A. Jones

See also Mahavir Jayanti; Mauna Agyaras; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paush Dashami.

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Passover

Passover is the English name of Pesach, the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread (discussed in a separate entry under Pesach). Pesach was commanded to be an annual memorial festival among the Jewish people in Exodus 12 recalling God's deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. A key event in that deliverance was the plague in which God killed the firstborn of each Egyptian household, while passing over the homes of the Hebrews whose house had been marked with the blood of a freshly slaughtered lamb. This event was marked by a meal that included a lamb slaughtered in the Jewish temple and unleavened bread, bread taken on the trip out of Egypt prepared in haste with no time for the leaven to act. Each year, Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach.

The Christian appropriation began simultaneously with the formation of the Christian community. Among the early memories of the life of Jesus was a trip he made to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate Pesach when he was but 12 years old. While in the city, he wandered from the family and was found in the temple speaking to the elders (Luke 2:40–52). Then, during his adult ministry, he would spend much of the year traveling through the countryside but always returned to Jerusalem for Passover. Traditionally, the length of his ministry was set at three years, as the New Testament accounts of his life placed him at three different Passovers in Jerusalem (John 2, John 5, and Mark 7), prior to the one during which time he is arrested and executed.

On the last visit to Jerusalem, he celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples, the account of which become the basis of the future remembrances of that, as the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, are regularly celebrated by Christians today (though in a variety of forms and occasions that range from daily to weekly to monthly to quarterly to annually). Following that last Passover supper, he was arrested, tried, and executed. As he died, it was reported that the veil separating the most holy space from the rest of the temple was rent in two.

That year, Passover was on Thursday. Christ was executed on Friday, and remained dead through the Sabbath. Christianity emerged after Jesus was reported to have risen from the dead on the first day of the new week, Sunday, and subsequently appeared to his disciples at various times and places.

The celebration of Easter (i.e., Christ's resurrection) superseded Passover in the Christian church. However, it was tied to Passover in that the events of Christ's death and resurrection began with a Passover Seder (Luke 22:15–16) and were concluded during the Passover week. Jesus was likened to a Passover lamb

sacrificed by God for the deliverance of humanity—the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus as the Passover lamb continues as one of the most central and powerful symbols within Christianity.

Beginning early in the fourth century, as the church moved from its outlaw status in the Roman Empire and began to hold church councils for deciding basic questions, the question of dating Easter came to the fore. A method was adopted that followed the Jewish methods of determining the date of Passover, which, due to the use of the lunar calendar, fell on a different day each year on the Julian calendar used throughout the Roman Empire at the time. Easter was set as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox (March 21). Passover/Pesach fell on Nissan 15, the first full moon after the spring equinox.

Because of the inaccuracy in the Julian calendar, the actual spring equinox began to drift away from March 21. A reformed Julian calendar continues to be used among Eastern Orthodox (a few even continuing to use the unreformed calendar), and their Easter celebration has become separated from that of the Western church, which adopted the Gregorian calendar that returned the spring equinox to March 21. That congruence remains in effect in the Common Era calendar.

Toward a Christian Passover

In the 19th century, following the Great Disappointment, when Adventist Christians were questioning the nonappearance of Christ as William Miller (1782–1849) had proclaimed would occur in 1843–1844, some Adventist leaders turned to the Bible for new insights. Ellen G. White (1827–1915) was introduced to the sabbatarianism, which she accepted. The practice led to a new appreciation of Jewish law and undergirded her interest in health and diet reform. Among Adventist sabbatarians not connected to White and the Seventh-day Adventist Church she founded, speculation led toward a new appreciation of the Jewish festivals, a celebration of which developed among some of the splinter groups of the Church of God (Seventh-day). The renewed interest in the Jewish festivals was also related to a critique of the celebration of Christmas and Easter as surviving Paganism.

From the sabbatarian Church of God groups, the celebration of the Jewish festivals, especially the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, passed to Herbert W. Armstrong (1892–1986), the founder of the Worldwide Church of God. He tied the celebration of the Jewish feasts to a broad critique of holidays in general, both the uniquely Christian holidays and a number of widely celebrated secular holidays (Valentine's Day, Halloween) along with the idea of celebrating birthdays. Armstrong also believed in the practice of tithing and suggested that along with tithing a tenth of one's income to the Worldwide Church of God that members tithe a second 10 percent to be dedicated to celebrating Passover.

Still other Adventist groups, most notably the Jehovah's Witnesses, recognizing the Lord's Supper as having originated in a Passover seder, adopted the practice of an annual memorial meal, sometimes called the Lord's Evening Meal, which is held on the first evening of Passover/Pesach each year. Witnesses do not use the

modern Jewish calendar, and their dating will on occasion correspond more with the same full moon as the Jewish festival of Purim, which is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (and hence usually occurs in mid-March on the Common Era calendar).

Jewish Christians

Over the centuries, many Jews have converted to Christianity, but in the 20th century, a number of Jews who became Christians have consciously decided to keep much of their Jewish culture, some to the point of founding and maintaining synagogues in which worship resembles that in a Jewish synagogue, as much as is possible without directly denying basic Christian affirmations concerning Jesus's divinity and his actions that bring salvation. Most Messianic synagogues continue to celebrate Passover but have poured new content into it. While adhering to many of the forms of the traditional Pesach meal, the Messianic practice centers on the concept that Jesus (whom they call in Hebrew Yeshua) was the sacrificial Passover lamb.

The Jews for Jesus, a group of Christians of Jewish background that originated at the same time as the Messianic movement, but do not believe in separate Christian synagogues, have developed a program for informing congregations of Christian believers about the Jewish background of their practices, especially Passover. Each spring, representatives of the movement will visit Christian congregations and offer a program demonstrating and explaining the Pesach meal and its role as background for the Christian communion service.

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See also Calendars, Religious; Common Era Calendar; Easter; Pesach; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Patotsav

Patotsav is a Hindu festival celebrating the anniversaries of the installation of the murtis (statues of the deities) at the temple. It is primarily a festival within the

Swaminarayan movement. Since murtis may be installed at various points during the year, the celebration for any given murti may occur on any given day.

Swaminarayan devotees see Patotsav as a re-consecration ceremony. The practice was begun out of a widespread belief that murtis lose their divinity to some degree simply from the volume of *maya* (illusion) they must deal with in their assisting devotees. Swaminarayan leaders have emphasized that such is not the case; the divinity of the murtis is never dissipated. It is the devotion of followers that often decreases. Patotsav is intended to revive the sentiments that devotees have for the murtis and for their guru.

Besides the annual Patotsav festival for the murtis, in Swaminarayan temples, there is a daily bhakti (devotional) observance that begins with a washing to the murtis first with a mixture of milk yogurt, ghee, honey, and saffron water (*abbishek*) and then with water. Then the deities are dressed in their appropriate clothing for public viewing. The *bahishek* is later made available to devotees for their consumption. A similar daily occurrence is found in Krishna temples of the Gaudiya Math tradition (including those of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness).

Constance A. Jones

See also Guru Purnima.

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Paush Dashami

Paush Dashami is a Jain holy day celebrated as the birthday of the 23rd Tirthankara (saint). Jains believe that their faith was established by a lineage of 24 saints, the last one being Mahavira, generally considered the founder of the community. The Tirthankara immediately prior to Mahavira was Lord Parshvanath, who is said to have taken human birth on the 10th day of the Indian month of Pausha (December–January on the Common Era calendar). During Pausha, observant Jains join in three days of fasting, the reciting of Jain hymns, and meditation.

Among the places where Paush Dashami is most observed is Shankheswar, a village in the Indian state of Gujarat, in the midst of which a famous Jain temple is located. It has become a site for pilgrimages in that it is especially associated with the 23rd Tirthankara. Pilgrims arrive to both participate in the fast and to attend the large carnival organized for this celebration. The Paush Dashami pilgrimage is known for the fulfillment of those wishes made in an unselfish way with a right faith. The particular fast in which they engage, known as Aththam, is deemed to protect the believer from peril and to promote happiness and prosperity.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Akshay Tritiya (Jain); Gyana Panchami; Kartika Purnima; Mauna Agyaras; Mahavir Jayanti; Navpad Oli; New Year's Day (Jain); Paryushana.

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Pavarana Day. See Boun Ok Phansa

Peace and Good Voyage, Feast of Our Lady of (May)

The Philippines is home to two large annual celebrations focused upon veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The older of the two occurs in Antipolo, a suburb of Manila, where veneration is directed to a wooden statue of the Virgin originally carved and blessed in Acapulco, Mexico. It was carried aboard a Spanish galleon that moved back and forth from Mexico to the Philippines, and during its several voyages, it was credited with the ship's safely surviving threats from pirates and the ships of hostile competing nations. It finally arrived in the Philippines permanently in the care of the new governor general of the islands, Niño de Tabora (d. 1632), in 1626. He in turn delivered it into the care of the Jesuit priests, who placed it in their church of San Ignacio.

Because of its role in traveling the seas, the sailors had come to refer to the statue as Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. Eventually, the statue was taken to the Jesuit church in Santa Cruz. According to the story told about the statue, on two occasions, it disappeared from the Santa Cruz church only to be found high in the branches of a local breadfruit tree. Taking this occurrence as a sign, a new church was built adjacent to the tree, and the tree itself was cut down and the wood used to make the pedestal upon which the statue was then placed. The breadfruit tree's local name, *tipilo*, gave its name to the area of the new church, Antipolo.

The statue would remain in the church until World War II, when it was taken into hiding from the ravages of the war. It was returned when peace was restored; however, the original church in which it had been housed was severely damaged during the war and was pulled down. A new church was completed and, in 1950, the bishops of the Philippines proclaimed the church at Antipolo to be the national shrine of the country.

Our Lady of Antipolo is the subject of a national festival that lasts the entire month of May. It begins with an all-night vigil from 8:00 p.m. to dawn on May

Eve in commemoration of the statue's safe return after the war. Many who visit the statue do so to dedicate their new car or to prayer for safety on a long journey.

In 1997, an oratory to Our Lady of Peace and good voyage was dedicated by the late James Cardinal Hickey (1920–2004) of the Archdiocese of Washington and the Most Reverend Protacio Gungon, Bishop of Antipolo, in services at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Divino Rostro, Devotion to; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Peñafrancia, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Peñafrancia, Feast of Our Lady of (September)

The Feast of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, the largest annual celebrative event in the Philippines, is a nine-day festival in Naga City, the capital of the province of Camarines Sur, the Philippines, culminating on the actual feast day, the third Saturday of September. The story of the festival begins in the 15th century in Spain. Based on an apparition of the Virgin, a young Frenchman named Simon launched a search for a place he only knew by name, Peña de Francia. It was on no map he could find, so he left Paris and wandered the countryside. Several years later his quest took him to Salamanca, Spain, where he learned of a mountain by that name. In a cave in the mountain, prompted by another apparition, he discovered a buried image of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus. That image later became a valued relic for the people of the area.

Three hundred years later, a young seminarian in Manila, the Philippines, from a family that came from Peñafrancia, Spain, became ill. He prayed to the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Peñafrancia, whose picture he carried with him everywhere he went. He made a vow to the virgin that if cured, he would build a chapel for her on the bank of the river that flowed through Manila. He was cured and eventually ordained as the first diocesan priest in Naga City (then known as Ciudad de Nueva Caceres), the capital of the province of Camarines Sur, far from Manila. To fulfill his vow, he mobilized a team of men to build a chapel on the banks of the Bikol River that flowed through his new hometown.

Equally important, he also commissioned a local artisan to carve an image of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, based on the ever-present picture of her he carried with him. Even before the statue was completed, reports of miracles credited to the Virgin began to circulate through the town. As the chapel was finished and the

image installed, many miracles spread among the people as did devotion to Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia, from Naga throughout the Diocese of Nueva Caceres. Today, as many as six million people will head to Camarines Sur in September each year.

The annual festival begins on the second Friday of the month when the image of the Virgin is brought from its shrine, now housed at the new Our Lady of Peñafrancia Basilica, the successor to that chapel originally constructed early in the 18th century, to the Naga Cathedral, where it will rest for the next week. For this transfer of the image, the faithful will line the river bank or take to a boat as the route from the shrine to cathedral follows the river through the city, and the virgin will ride on a flatboat decorated for the occasion. During the nine days in the cathedral, each evening will be the occasion of a special nine-day service of prayer (what is termed a novena). The country's elite compete for the privilege of sponsoring one of the evening prayer sessions.

After nine days as the focus of attention in town, Our Lady of Peñafrancia is returned to her shrine, again using the river as her highway. This evening procession will be lit by thousands of candles from followers along the shore and in their own boats following the Virgin's vessel. As the Virgin passes cries of "Viva la Virgen" ("Long live the Virgin!") will echo through the city. Once it reaches the shrine, a group of selected parishioners will lovingly carry it from the riverbank to the shrine, where it will be formally received with a liturgy led by high-ranking church officials from around the country.

In September 2010, the Shrine of Our Lady of Peñafrancia celebrated its 300th year as the place of devotion to the Virgin. The celebration at Peñafrancia is one of two main festivals to the virgin, the other being the Feast of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage held annually in May in Antiplolo, in suburban Manila.

In the 19th century, the devotion to Our Lady of Peñafrancia was bolstered by the donation of a cloth image of Jesus, the Divino Rostro, to the chapel of Peñafrancia. That image subsequently has become a secondary focus of devotion, and it accompanies the Virgin as she moves about during the festival.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Devotion to; Divino Rostro; Peace and Good Voyage, Feast of Our Lady of.

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Penitentes

The Penitentes, or Los Hermanos Penitentes, is an association of American Roman Catholics whose members reside in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, and who have become well known for their realistic reenactment of

the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus each year during Holy Week. This rather extreme practice of penance is performed in an effort to make reparation for their sins. Their observance of Holy Week includes various forms of bodily mortification, especially flagellation.

The practices of the Penitentes have been traced back to the medieval flagellants, specifically to the Third Order of Franciscans founded by Saint Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. Unlike the brothers and sisters of the first and second orders of Franciscans, the Third Order were lay believers who continued to live a secular life but showed their commitments to Christ through a set of strict disciplines. That the group was early on called the Order of Penitents indicates the priority assigned to various penitential actions as vital elements in the discipline. The Order of Penitents was but one of a number of penitential groups to emerge in this era and who have continued to operate, though their current practices are considerable less extreme than those recorded in medieval times.

Meanwhile, in New Mexico beginning in the 16th century, the Franciscans emerged as a powerful force in the expansion and maintenance of the Catholic Church for three centuries. However, through the early 19th century, as the territory passed from Spanish to Mexican and then American hands, the Franciscan leadership lost much of its power, and its presence was considerably reduced. The Penitentes arose, in part, to fill the vacuum of leadership, especially in areas with little or no pastoral care.

The Penitentes were organized as a decentralized association of a set of locally autonomous groups. Each local fraternity selects its own officers, with the *hermano mayor* or elder brother given extensive authority. The elder brother usually holds office until his death. A very few women have been admitted to a female auxiliary; however, the group remains basically an all-male association.

Penitence is practiced year-round, but activity peaks during Holy Week each year. It is during this time, for example, that new members are admitted to the group. The initiation ceremony occurs in the *morada* or council house. After satisfactorily answering a set of questions, the candidate proceeds to wash the feet of the other members, receives lashes from any members whom he may have offended in the past, and finally receives an incision in the shape of the cross on his lower back.

The most important events occur on Good Friday (the day commemorating Christ's death in the Christian calendar), during which members reenact Christ's march to Golgotha, where he was crucified. In the Penitente process, most members would flagellate themselves. Leading their procession would be one or more people carrying a heavy cross. The procession culminates in planting of the cross(es) in the ground and the lashing of one of the members to it. Though this part of the ceremonies was usually conducted in private, over the years, nonmembers have been present and observed it. In more recent years, the event was photographed and even a documentary film made of it.

The Catholic Church officially distanced itself from the Penitentes and, on several occasions, attempted to suppress it. As early as 1886, the archbishop of Santa

Fe, for example, ordered the groups to stop flagellation and the carrying of the crosses. He distributed copies of the contemporary rules of the Franciscan Third Order and requested them to reformulate their activity in accordance with it. The members of the groups largely ignored him. More recent attempts to disband or reform the movement have not worked, and it continues to operate to the present day. In recent years, large crowds have gathered at sites where the group observes its Holy Week activities to observe the processions.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Elevation of the True Cross; Good Friday; Holy Week; Maundy Thursday; Procession de la Penitencia, La (Spain); Procession of Penitents; Procession of the Fuenti.

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Pentecost

Pentecost is the festival that marks the birth of the Christian church by the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles 2:1–41. The word “Pentecost” means “50th day” and is celebrated 50 days after Easter. Because the timing of Pentecost is tied to the moveable date of Easter, it can occur as early as May 10 and as late as June 13.

The Christian feast of Pentecost originated in the Jewish festival that began on the 50th day after the beginning of Passover (Pesach). It is called the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) and was originally an agricultural festival celebrating and giving thanks for the “first fruits” of the early spring harvest (Leviticus 23 and Exodus 23, 34). By the early New Testament period, it had gradually lost its association with agriculture and became associated with the celebration of God’s creation of his people and their religious history. By the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the festival focused exclusively on God’s gift of *Torah* (the “Law”) on Mount Sinai.

According to the account in Acts, 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles gathered together in Jerusalem for the Jewish harvest festival. The day has

significance in the history of the Christian church, whose members began to see the events of the day as the time God sent the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28–29).

Pentecost is also called “Whitsunday” because in ancient times, it was customary to baptize adult converts on Pentecost. The catechumens would wear white robes on that day, so Pentecost was often called “Whitsunday” or “White Sunday.” Consequently, the present-day rite of confirmation is still often celebrated on Pentecost.

The feast of Pentecost is universally celebrated in the Christian church, though the liturgical practices are not as extensive and well-known as the greater feasts of Easter and Christmas, for example. The church fathers Iraneaus and Tertullian attest to its celebration in apostolic times.

In Italy, it is customary to scatter rose leaves from the ceiling of the churches to recall the miracle of the fiery tongues. In France, celebrants will blow trumpets during the service to recall the sound of the mighty wind, which accompanied the giving of the Spirit. The Eastern Orthodox carries flowers and green branches in their hands to mark the day.

Red is the liturgical color for Pentecost. Red recalls the tongues of flame in which the Holy Spirit descended on the first Pentecost. The color red also signifies the blood of the martyrs who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, held firm to the true faith even at the cost of their lives.

Pentecost represents God’s gracious, enabling presence actively at work among his people, calling and enabling them to live out in dynamic ways their witness. For Christians, Pentecost Sunday is a day to celebrate hope evoked by the knowledge that God through his Holy Spirit is at work among his people. It is a celebration of newness, of recreation, of renewal of purpose, mission, and calling as God’s people. It is a celebration of God’s ongoing work in the world. Yet, it is also a recognition that his work is done through his people as he pours out his presence upon them.

Kevin Quast

See also Christmas; Easter; Pesach; Shavuot.



Pope Benedict XVI sprinkles holy water during the Pentecost Mass at Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome on May 23, 2010. (AP/Wide World Photos)

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Perpetual Help, Feast of Our Lady of

In contrast to Eastern Orthodox churches, icons are not among more common items in the Roman Catholic Church, though not unknown. It is also the case that the most well-known icon among Roman Catholics has an Eastern Orthodox origin, having originated on the island of Crete. As the story goes, a merchant stole the icon from a church around 1495 and brought it with him to Rome. He was not able to enjoy the picture for long, as he became ill; and as he was dying, he forced a promise from a friend to return the painting to its original home. The friend's wife rejected that notion as she liked the beautiful painting.

Eventually, the six-year-old daughter of the merchant's friend experienced an apparition of the Virgin who told her that the icon should be given to the Church of Saint Matthew the Apostle, located between the churches of Santa Maria Maggiore and Saint John Lateran, and placed on public view. Most importantly, as she spoke to the young girl, she identified herself as Holy Mary of Perpetual Help.

The picture was formally installed at Saint Matthew's on March 27, 1499. It remained under the care of the Augustinian priests in charge of the church until 1798, when the French invaded Rome. Saint Matthew's was one of the buildings destroyed by the invading forces. Fortunately, the icon was taken out of the church before the army arrived and quietly hidden away at an Augustinian chapel away from the city. There it remained for the next six decades, largely forgotten.

Little thought was given to the icon until 1863, when Fr. Francis Blosi, a Jesuit priest, raised the issue. His words reached the ears of Fr. Michael Marchi, a Redemptorist priest, who happened to have visited the chapel then housing the icon. It was also the case that the Redemptorist order had purchased the land upon which Saint Matthew's was previously located and erected a new building, the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer and of Saint Alphonsus. The story of the missing icon was presented to Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878), who ordered the Augustinians to turn the icon over to the Redemptorists so it could be installed in the new Church of Saint Alphonsus.

The icon was returned to Rome in 1866 and formally crowned the next year. June 27 was designated as the feast day of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. A confraternity was formed and soon elevated to archconfraternity status. The piety surrounding the icon had grown steadily through the 20th century to the present. Both a litany and novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help are widely circulated. Among the many churches now dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help are the cathedrals in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and in Rapid City, South Dakota.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Czestochowa, Feast of Our Lady of; Image Not-Made-by-Hands, Feast of the.

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Pesach

Pesach, the Hebrew name of what in English is termed Passover, is a major festival in the Jewish ritual year. Pesach calls to memory major events in the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt and the establishment of Judaism. The events are recorded in the opening chapters of the book of Exodus in the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament), but especially chapter 12. According to the story, Moses, who had escaped Egypt after killing a brutal Egyptian slave master, returned to Pharaoh's court with a demand that the Hebrews be allowed to leave Israel. When Pharaoh refused, he threatened calamities, and successively a set of plagues hit the land.

Unmoved by the plagues, the still-stubborn Pharaoh was hit with one final plague. God threatened to move among the Egyptians and strike the firstborn in each house with death, including the heir to the throne. Speaking on God's behalf, Moses then instructed the Hebrews to take a lamb free of blemishes and on the appointed day kill it. He then instructed that:

[T]hey shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof. And ye shall let nothing of

it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD’S passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:7–13)

In the wake of the deaths, Pharaoh relented and the Hebrew left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and found their way to Mount Sinai, where God gave them the law. Pharaoh’s army being destroyed when it attempted to pursue the Hebrew, there was no attempt to return them to Egypt in the years ahead in the Sinai.

In the giving of the instructions for the Hebrews to kill the lamb, mark their homes with blood, cook the lamb, and consume it, Moses also underscored the importance of the events by telling the Hebrew to set up their calendar with these events marking the first month, to prepare to repeat the events annually forever as a means of remembering what had happened. After the Exodus had begun, the Hebrews were told that the annual remembrance of Pesach would be for seven days (Exodus 13:6). Further details would be added later.

Through the centuries, the events would be remembered. Throughout the Jewish Bible, God would be spoken of as the “the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt.” The events of the Exodus are recalled in the daily morning and evening prayers and tied to the prayer shawl and the *tefillin* worn on the Sabbath.

The celebration of Pesach carried with it the setting of the Jewish calendar to begin in the spring, in what is now termed the month of Nissan. However, in the sixth century BCE, during the Babylonia exile, New Year’s was moved to the fall. Today, some speak of the religious year beginning Nissan 1 and the civil year beginning Tishri 1. In either case, should Nissan 1 occur too early (before the spring equinox), an intercalary year is added immediately before the month of Nissan. Passover is a weeklong festival (seven days for Reformed Jews and eight days for Conservative and Orthodox Jews) that begins on Nissan 14.

Pesach, along with Shavuot and Sukkot, was one of the three pilgrim festivals during which the entire Jewish community made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where access to the temple was available. The destruction of the temple and the scattering of the Jewish people thus had a marked effect upon the way that the three festivals can and are celebrated. The Samaritans, a sect with Jewish origins, still make pilgrimages for these festivals to Mount Gerizim, though only males engage in public worship.

In celebrating Pesach, the Jewish attempt both to remember the events and to symbolically reenact them, and thus come from the festival feeling as if they had just been delivered from bondage. In preparation for the Pesach, houses will be

cleaned to make sure that no leavening is in the home. During the week, only matzah bread, unleavened bread made simply and quickly, is an acceptable form of grain product for consumption. When the Exodus began, there was no time to wait for the bread to rise. For this reason, Pesach is often called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Orthodox Jews will have a separate set of dishes for use during Pesach. Products for Pesach will be especially designated in stores that serve or sell Jewish “kosher” foods.

On the first two evenings of Passover (Nissan 15 and 16), a special ritual feast, the Seder, is held in the home. Guests are invited and included in the celebration where possible. The ritual for the occasion consists primarily of retelling the Exodus deliverance story, especially for the children, recalling Exodus 12:26–27: “And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you: What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say: It is the sacrifice of the LORD’S passover, for that He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.” At key points in the story, the children and youth take the lead in directing the story, and as it begins, the youngest child asks, “Why is this night different from all other nights of the year?”

The Seder service also includes the blessing and consumption of wine—four cups symbolic of the fourfold redemption recounted in Exodus 6:6: “I am the LORD, and I will *bring you out* from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will *deliver you* from their bondage, and I will *redeem you* with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; 7 and I will *take you to Me* for a people.” Also, a fifth cup is poured, symbolizing that God’s promise of returning his people to their homeland remains unfulfilled. Traditionally, the wine in this cup is not drunk. It is often called Elijah’s cup, as the prophet Elijah is supposed to usher in the messianic age. Since the founding of the state of Israel, many Jews look upon the cup as symbolic of a promise that is beginning to be fulfilled, and will sip from Elijah’s cup.

As recounted in the instructions instituting Pesach, bitter herbs are eaten with the meal, symbolic of the bitterness of slavery. A mixture of chopped nuts, apple, cinnamon, and wine symbolizes the mortar used in the building projects of the Pharaoh at which the Hebrews labored. A roasted shank bone is placed on the Seder table, but not eaten. It is a reminder of the temple, now destroyed, where the paschal lamb for the Passover meal was sacrificed. Since the destruction of the temple, no paschal lamb can be sacrificed. Thus the Seder ends with the proclamation, “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Contemporary Jews see the liberation-from-bondage theme of Pesach as having great relevance for the Jewish presence in the larger social realm. Jews have been prominent through the 20th century in the struggles to free the Jewish community from the effects of prejudice, and in the struggle have generalized their condition to other groups with whom they share a history of slavery, persecution, and discrimination.

In Israel, Passover is observed as a seven-day holiday. The first and last days are recognized as legal holidays. Within the religious community, these days are

considered holy days that should be marked by abstention from work and religious services, especially those surrounding the Seder meals. The middle days of Pesach are known as Chol HaMoed, or festival days.

Passover and Christianity

Of all the Jewish holy days, Pesach has had the most effect on Christianity. Jesus's death was associated with Passover, and Christ was described as the pascal lamb. The setting of the dates of the Christian holy week culminating in Easter is based on the date of Passover. In the 20th century, some Christian groups, primarily out of the Adventist tradition, began to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a primary Christian festival. In a different vein, Messianic Jews, consisting of Jews and others who follow Jewish culture, have also instituted the practice of celebrating a Christian Passover. The Christian relation to Pesach is discussed in a separate entry on Passover.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Calendars, Religious; Passover; Shavuot; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Sukkot.

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Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts. (July 29)

Among the earliest of commemorations known to have been celebrated in the ancient church was a commemoration of what were acknowledged to be the two most important of the apostles. To quell any bickering over which one of the two was more worthy, and in the belief that each was martyred on the same day (July 29)—and some say the same year (67 CE)—their feast day was established on the same day. Thus, they were proclaimed to be equal in the eyes of the church.

Peter, one of the first called, had emerged as the leader of the 12 apostles that gathered around Jesus. He is also the person to whom Jesus spoke in the face of Peter's affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah:

He said unto them, "But who say ye that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say unto you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he charged the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ. (Matthew 16:15–20)



Jesus Christ gives the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to Saint Peter. (Library of Congress)

Peter was believed to have been martyred in Rome, and this charge to Peter and the apostles would later become the basis of asserting the primacy of the Diocese of Rome, which cites Peter as its first bishop. Peter is also believed to be buried under what is now Saint Peter's Basilica.

Paul emerged after Jesus's death and resurrection as an "apostle out of season," having not known Jesus after the flesh. He asserted his place among the apostles as a result of his encounter on the road to Damascus, as recounted in the ninth chapter of the New Testament Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Following his dramatic conversion to Christianity, he was responsible for the spread of the church around the Mediterranean Basin. The many epistles that he wrote to the churches he founded and the people associated with him form a major block of the New Testament writings.

While the Book of Acts ends before describing his death, tradition has placed his death in Rome and his burial just outside the old city. The present Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls rests on what is believed to be his burial site. It is the successor building to the original basilica erected by the emperor Constantine. The heads of both Peter and Paul are said to be preserved at the church of Saint John Lateran in Rome.

The church commemorated the martyrdom of Peter and Paul by the third century. In the Eastern Orthodox churches, the day concludes a several-week fast that

began on the second Monday after Pentecost, The Apostles' fast concludes with an all-night prayer vigil on evening of June 28. In recent years, the day has been a time of ecumenical contact between Roman Catholic leadership and that of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Each year on the Feast of Saint Agnes (January 21), the Trappist monastery in Rome selects two lambs which are taken to the Basilica of Saint Agnes for a blessing ceremony. The lambs are then taken for an appearance before the pope and then given to the Benedictine nuns at the church dedicated to the martyr Santa Cecilia in Rome. The nuns care for the lambs until Maundy Thursday, during Holy Week, when the lambs are sheared of their wool. Their wool is then used to make a pallium, a unique of ecclesiastical garb which only the pope and archbishops (and on rare occasion, a bishop) are allowed to wear them. The pallium is a sign of episcopal authority, and until he receives his pallium from the pope, an archbishop cannot exercise jurisdiction over his assigned territory. Each year on the day commemorating the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, the pope presents the pallium to the Roman Catholic Church's new archbishops (as well as to those who might be changing jurisdictions).

The Doukhobors, a Russian free church movement, saw the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul as a day of celebration. At the same time, through the 19th century, the group was the target of constant persecution due to its pacifism and refusal to bear arms on behalf of the Russian army. The increased pressure on the group in the 1890s led them, on the evening of Saints Peter and Paul Day in 1895 to conduct a symbolic destruction of all the weapons they had among them. This event of the "Burning of the Arms" is currently celebrated as Peter's Day, sometimes called Doukhobor Peace Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chair of St. Peter, Feast of the; Conversion of St. Paul, Feast of the; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Peter Baptist and Companions, Saint's Day of St. (February 6)

Sometimes overshadowed by Francis Xavier, who was the first Roman Catholic priest to visit Japan, Peter Baptist (1542–1597) was a pioneering Franciscan missionary who followed up on the work Francis had initiated. Peter Baptist Blasquez, born to a noble Spanish family, joined the Franciscans in 1567. Caught up in the 16th-century international expansion of the order, he was initially sent to Mexico and then assigned to work in the Philippine Islands, which set him in place in

1592 when Philip II of Spain (r. 1554–1598), who also at the time ruled Portugal, needed someone to negotiate a peace agreement with Taiko Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the ruler of Japan.

After working out the peace treaty, Peter Baptist and several colleagues stayed in Japan to spread Christianity. Their success, which included establishing both churches and hospitals, threatened Hideyoshi to the point that in December 1596, he moved against the missionaries. Peter Baptist and 25 others, both Franciscans and Jesuits, were tossed into prison. In January 1597, they were condemned to death. They were subsequently moved to Nagasaki, where they were executed by crucifixion on February 5. During the process, each had had an ear cut off and was stabbed with a spear in a parody of events during Jesus's final week as recounted in the Christian New Testament.

Peter Baptist was beatified in 1627, and he and his companions were canonized as a group in 1862. He is among the patron saints of Japan.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Forty Martyrs' Day; Francis Xavier, Saint's Day of St.; Jogues, John de Brébeuf and Companions, Saint's Day of St. Isaac.

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Peter Chanel, Saint's Day of St. (April 28)

Pierre Louis Marie Chanel (1803–1841), born in La Potière, France, grew up in a pious environment and became a Roman Catholic priest. He developed a desire to become a foreign missionary but, following his ordination in 1827, seemed continually channeled in other directions. In 1831, he learned of a group of parish priests who were planning a new religious order dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He aligned with them and became a founding member of the Society of Mary (popularly known as the Marists). Six years later, when the new order received papal approval, he was finally commissioned as a missionary to the South Pacific. The trip to the Pacific took him to Gambier, then Tahiti, with the goal of setting up work in the Wallis and Futuna islands. Chanel settled on Futuna Island, along with a French lay brother, Marie-Nizier Delorme.

Warmly received initially by the island's king, Niuliki, Chanel went about the task of learning the language and establishing a small mission. As the king learned about Christianity, rather than being attracted to it, he came to see it as a challenge to his political and religious authority as the leader of the island's people. The crisis came several years after Chanel settled on Futura. The king's son, Meitala,

converted and sought baptism. On learning of his son's intention, Niuliki sent his son-in-law, Musumusu, to attempt to resolve the issue. Musumusu got into a fight with Meitala and was injured. On April 28, 1841, he went to Chanel for medical attention, but while there, he took an axe and killed Chanel and dismembered his body.

In January of the following year, it taking some months for word to circulate of Chanel's death, French authorities retrieved his remains, and they were taken to New Zealand. In 1850, they were returned to France, to the Society of Mary's motherhouse in Lyon. Meanwhile, the majority of Futura residents became Roman Catholics, and it remains the majority religion. After converting, the people of Futura created a penitential dance called the *eke*, in Chanel's memory.

Chanel was beatified in 1889 and canonized in 1954. His feast day is April 28. In 1977, his relics were returned to Futuna. He was named the patron saint of Oceania.

J. Gordon Melton

See also White Sunday.

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Peter Claver, Saint's Day of St. (September 9)

Saint Peter Claver (1581–1654) was born and raised in Spain, and as a young man joined the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). He was still in his 20s when in 1610 he left Europe for the Americas. He settled in Cartagena (Colombia), and there completed his studies and was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest (1615). Cartagena was a center for the slave trade, and Claver was among those who responded to Pope Paul III's (r. 1534–1549) bull against slavery in 1537. Similarly, his predecessor, Alfonso de Sandoval, also a Jesuit, had worked with the slaves for four decades prior to Claver's arrival in Cartagena. Claver became known for his own self-identification as "the slave of the Negroes forever." Claver moved among the slaves, especially those on the waterfront, and brought them food and medicines. By both word and deed, he attempted to bring them the church's teachings and an understanding of their status as people of dignity and worth. During his several decades of activity, it is estimated that he baptized some 300,000 Africans. His fellow Spaniards came to know him as the person who would visit the plantations

developing in the interior and stay with the slaves in their quarters rather than the lodging offered by the owners.

His health declined as the 1850s began, and he was forced into inactivity for the last years of his life. He died on September 8, 1654. He was rediscovered amid the slaver debates of the 19th century, beatified in 1850, and canonized in 1888. Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) declared him the worldwide patron of missionary work among black slaves. Today he is one of the patron saints of Colombia and of African Americans.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.; Martin de Porres, Saint's Day of St.

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Peter of Alcantara, Saint's Day of St. (October 19)

Peter of Alcantara (1499–1562) was a Spanish Franciscan friar born at Alcantara, Spain, into a well-to-do noble family. He was given a good education at the University of Salamanca, after which he joined the Franciscans of the Stricter Observance (1515). In 1521, he founded a new community of the Stricter Observance at Badajoz, near the border with Portugal. He was ordained two years later. His career was now marked by his own strict practice of the stricter observance, the severity under which he lived and attempted to communicate to other proving continued opposition. Named a superior of a Franciscan province in 1538, he resigned from that position two years later. He retired to a mountain retreat in Portugal. Over the next years, a number of friars were attracted to him and small communities began to emerge. They emerged as a new Province of Arrábida in 1560.

In 1555, he walked to Rome barefooted to gain the permission of Pope Julius III (r. 1550–1555) to found some new centers in Spain. Several emerged in the next year and became the basis of a new Province of Saint Joseph. The extreme rules spread to other Franciscan centers in Spain and Portugal leading to their reformation (this at the time that Protestantism was thriving in northern Europe). At this time, Peter made common cause with Theresa of Avila, who was working a similar reformation among the Carmelites. It appears that a letter from Peter (dated April 14, 1562) occasioned the founding of her convent at Avila that year. In fact, it is from Saint Teresa's autobiography that we know of much of Peter's life.

Peter led an extremely austere life and made his home in a room with a floor area of only four and a half square feet. He was often seen in prayer and ecstasies, and on occasion was reported to have levitated. He died October 18, 1562, in a monastery at Arenas, not far from Avila.

Peter of Alcantara was beatified in 1622 and canonized in 1669. His feast day is October 19, the day of his death being already assigned to Saint Luke the Evangelist. He is one of the patron saints of Brazil, but that status did not prevent his name from being removed from the list of saints acknowledged by the general church in 1969, meaning that his veneration is now a matter that is optional and local.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anthony of Padua, Saint's Day of St.; Benedict the African, Saint's Day of St.

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Phagwa. See Holi

Phang Lhabsol

Phang Lhabsol is a Buddhist festival unique to Sikkim, a formerly independent state now a part of modern India and adjacent to Tibet. The Buddhism practiced there closely resembles the Vajrayana Buddhism of Tibet. This festival focuses on Mount Khangchendzonga, a spectacular multi-peaked mountain that is regarded as the protective guardian deity of Sikkim. In the festival, supplication is made to the mountain for continued protection from a variety of possible natural calamities, and the necessities for a good harvest.

The celebration of Phang Lhabsol is traced to a treaty signed by Thekong Tek, a priest of the Lepcha people of Sikkim (who shared ancestry with the Tibetans), and Kaye Bhumsa, who ruled the Kham region of Tibet. According to the story, Kaye Bhumsa and his wife Chomo Guru were childless. The lama priests of Kham advised his seeking out Thekong Tek and his wife Nekong Ngyal and receive their blessing, which he did. Over the next few years, three male children were born by his wife. Kaye Bhumsa made a return visit to Sikkim to thank Thekong and his wife for their blessing and offered his pledge that their two peoples would remain brothers forever. A document embodying this agreement was signed at Kabi Longstok, at the foot of Mount Khangchendzonga, some 10 miles from Gangtok. The

annual celebration of Phang Lhabsol acknowledges the mountain as the only witness to the signing of the agreement. A large stone marked the spot, and a Statue of Unity was erected in commemoration of this brotherhood treaty, which remains in force to the present.

Highlighting the celebration are the many dances, including the tradition Tibetan chaam dancing by the monks. There is, for example, a warrior dance distinguished by its intricate steps and leaping dancers shouting out war cries. The joy of the occasion is portrayed in a dance in which one monk dresses as Mount Khangchendzonga and another as Mahakala, a Dharma protector deity. Around 1700, the then-king of Sikkim Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal had a dream in which an angel visited him and he learned a new form of dance.

The Phang Lhabsol celebration is held on the 15th day of the seventh month according to Tibetan lunar calendar, which is late August or early September on the Common Era calendar. The celebration was originally held at Rabdenste, the first capital of Sikkim but shifted to the Tsuglakhang Palace at Gangtok, which became the capital in 1894. After the country was absorbed into India, the celebration spread to different locations throughout Sikkim.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Butter Lamp Festival; Chokhor Duchen; Dalai Lama's Birthday; Losar; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival.

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Pilgrimage of Sainte Anne d'Auray (July 26)

Sainte Anne d'Auray is a small village in the department of Morbihan in Brittany (France). As Christianity moved into the area, the residents reputedly built a chapel to Saint Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That chapel was destroyed in the seventh century and it was never rebuilt. Only a passing memory of the chapel remained.

Early in the 17th century, the village's connection to Saint Anne was renewed when a village resident, Yves Nicolazic, reported multiple apparitions of Saint Anne during which, on July 25, 1624, he was instructed to rebuild the chapel. On March 7, 1625, Nicolazic and some companions miraculously discovered what they believed to be the statue from the original chapel. Sebastien de Rosmadec, the bishop of Vannes, in whose diocese the village is located, became convinced of the genuineness of the apparitions and allowed the chapel project to go forward. Once completed, both Anne of Austria (1601–1666) and Louis XIII (1601–1643)

contributed to the embellishing of the sanctuary. Included in their gifts was a reputed relic of Saint Anne acquired in the 13th century from Jerusalem.

As the chapel gained in statue, pilgrimages to Sainte Anne d'Auray began, the most important being at Pentecost and on July 26, the Feast Day of Saint Anne. At the time of the French Revolution, the sanctuary was plundered and the Carmelites, into whose care the chapel had been placed, were driven away. In 1793, the old statue of Saint Anne, to which numerous accounts of miracles had been attributed, was burned. In spite of the desecration, the chapel still attracted the faithful.

Once the fury of the revolution died out, some recovery was possible. The Carmelite convent was reoccupied and became a seminary. A new statue of Saint Anne with the Virgin Mary replaced the one that had been destroyed. In 1866, a new basilica began to rise, and in 1868, Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) granted permission for the new statue of Saint Anne to be crowned, a practice he had earlier proposed for statues of the virgin. He also donated the marble for the high altar. The Basilica of Saint Anne has remained the most popular pilgrimage destination in Brittany to the present, more than a half million annually. Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) visited the site in 1996.

Those who come to Sainte Anne D'Auray on pilgrimage plan to spend the entire day of the pilgrimage at the church. They will attend Mass in the early morning and participate in a procession around the church afterwards. This procession will include many who attribute a miraculous escape and hence their life to the saint.

One outgrowth of the pilgrimage to Saint Anne's in Brittany was a pilgrimage gathering that emerged in the late 19th century in western Canada. In 1844, a Catholic mission was established on the shore of a lake in central Alberta, Canada, by Frs. Jean-Baptiste Thibault and Joseph Bourassa. Fr. Thibault named the lake Lac Sainte Anne. The mission was the first permanent Catholic work west of Winnipeg. Later supplied by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the mission thrived for a generation but in the 1880s suffered as the buffalo dwindled and the population declined. As the lake seemed no longer to function as a gathering place, by 1887, the decision had been made to close the mission.

At this time, the priest at the mission, a Father Lestanc took a trip back home to France and while there visited the Shrine of Sainte Anne d'Auray. While there, he felt God telling him not to close the mission. Upon his return to Canada, he built a shrine to Saint Anne at the lake and turned it into a place of pilgrimage. The first pilgrimage was scheduled for the summer of 1889. Several hundred attended. Today the shrine continues to draw people each summer for a pilgrimage and gathering for several days in July as close as possible to the feast day on July 26, with as many as 30,000 in attendance, many camping out in tents. It is the largest annual gathering of Native people in Canada.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anne, Feast Day of St.; Pentecost.

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Pilgrimage of the Dew

The Romeria del Rocio, or Pilgrimage of the Dew, is a Marian festival over the weekend of Pentecost in the Almonte region of Andalusia, Spain. It focuses upon a relatively modest statue (now almost invisible beneath the elaborate gold covering) of the Blessed Virgin Mary known as La Blanca Paloma, the White Dove, which is found in the Sanctuary of El Rocio, in Almonte. The festival originated in the 15th century after a hunter from the village of Villamanrique came upon a statue of the Virgin in a tree trunk amid the marshes of the Guadalquivir adjacent to what is now the national park of the Coto Donana. For several centuries, the celebration was a purely local affair, but participation slowly grew to become regional and national.

During the week before Pentecost, the roads throughout the region will be clogged with people and ox-drawn wagons. The wagons carry men and women dressed in their finest clothes, and groups of wagons will represent a local brotherhood led by a cart with a banner picturing the Virgin and identifying the group's home base. The walk to Almonte is a time for visiting, self-reflection, and a public demonstration of piety. As evening approaches, a field or other convenient location will be found to camp out for the evening and celebrate the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is planned to arrive at their destination on Pentecost, where the crowds will file past the church and pay their initial homage to the Virgin. In the evening, there will be fireworks and celebration into the wee hours.

The climax of the festival occurs on the Monday following Pentecost. The primary event is a massive procession of the statue of the Virgin, which leaves the sanctuary and shrine and is marched through the streets of Almonte. The most privileged of the pilgrims are selected to carry the statue on their shoulders, an honor sought by those hoping for special assistance from the Virgin in the coming year. A cadre of priests lead the procession amid cries of "Viva la Blanca Paloma" heard everywhere. The procession ends with the return of the Virgin to the church's altar. After one more evening of celebration, the pilgrims return to their mundane routines.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Pentecost; Romeria of La Virgen de Valme.

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Pitra Paksha

Pitra Paksha, observed during the fortnight of the waning moon during the Hindu month of Ashwin (September–October on the Common Era calendar) provides an opportunity for honoring one’s recently deceased ancestors. Some Hindus believe that the deceased enter a state of restless wandering in a ghost-like existence without a body. Only after the sacrifice (shraddha) offered during Pitra Paksha do they attain a status among the Divine Father (the Pitris) and a place in the blissful abode known as Pitri-Loka, where they abide for a time before reincarnating. If one’s ancestor is in Naraka, the hell realm, the performance of the sacrifice ameliorates their condition.

The offerings and accompanying ritual pujas for one’s ancestor is done on the particular day of their death as correlated to a day during the fortnight of the Pitra Paksha. While anyone may do the ritual, it is deemed most proper and efficacious if the eldest son of the family performs it. The puja is followed by a traditional feast offered to the pandits or priest who performs the puja. The puja is normally accompanied by a donation of food, clothing, and/or money to the pandits.

The Pitra Paksha concludes on “Mahalaya Amavasya,” the night of the new moon. Ceremonies performed on this day are thought to be of the most benefit to the ancestors. The action initiated during the Pitra Paksha is carried forward on the new moon of each month with a simple ritual called the *pitra tarpan*, a ceremony built around the chanting of mantras seeking peace for the departed souls and accompanying oblation of water.

Constance A. Jones

See also All Saints Day; Chaitra Purnima; Higan; Narak Chaturdashi; Obon Festival(s); Pure Brightness Festival; Samhain; Ullam-bana.

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Pleureuses, Ceremony of. See Good Friday

Ploughing Day

Ploughing Day, a Buddhist holiday unique to Thailand, derives from an ancient Hindu Indian day to look forward to a good harvest as the planting season begins.

From India it spread to other Asian countries, including Thailand. However, in Thailand, during the reign of King Rama IV (1804–1868), who also instituted the Magha Puja celebration, reformed the Ploughing Ceremony to align it with Buddhist practice. His new format for the old day also became a two-day ceremony held at the royal grounds (Sanam Luang) in Bangkok. Since the 1960s, the day has again been collapsed into a one-day ceremony held each year in May at the beginning of the rainy season.

The Royal Ploughing Ceremony is designed to encourage all the farmers to do their best for the country as a whole in the production of the rice, which is so vital to the diet. The ceremony begins with a procession led by a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Agriculture and two oxen dressed with golden cloaks and carrying the plough that will be used to perform the ceremony.

A high point in the ceremony is a divination process built around the selection of one of three sarongs, which will indicate factors such as the abundance of water and fertility of the ground. The day proceeds with the symbolic ploughing of three furrows and the planting of rice seeds that are then gathered by the farmer spectators as signs of a coming good harvest. The ceremony culminates with the two oxen being led to a pavilion where they will be offered seven foods. The particular food chosen becomes part of the information to be used by the priests in their formal prediction of the coming harvest. That prediction will, at a later time, be presented to the ruler and to the public.

While obviously a celebration of the agricultural cycle, the Ploughing Ceremony has a peculiarly Buddhist connotation. Most Buddhists think of the Buddha as having been enlightened in his 35th year while sitting under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhi Gaya, but there is a quite separate tradition that pictures him as having become enlightened when he was seven years old. At the time, he was watching someone plough a field. It is this tradition, which is alive and well in Thailand, that ties the Ploughing Ceremony to the country's Buddhist community.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Elephant Festival; Kathina Ceremony; Wesak/Vesak.

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Pongal. See Makar Sankranti

Pooram

Pooram is a unique festival of the Indian state of Kerala. Kerala is in turn one of the more unique states of India, having been the place where Christianity first manifested in strength and in which no single form of Hinduism dominates. Bosth Saivite (centered on the deity Shiva) and Vaishnava (centered on the deity Vishnu) are strong, but worship of the Mother Goddess as a manifestation of shakti energy is popular and there are numerous places for worship of the nagas, snake gods. Many have sacred snake groves near to their homes.

Pooram is an annual temple festival held in various locations in Kerala following the summer harvest. The festivals have come to be characterized by the presence of elephants, but on a spiritual level amount to a gathering of the many gods of the thousands of temples in a significant show of Hindu ecumenicity.

The largest and most famous of all Pooram celebrations is held at Thrissur, though this was not always the case. In centuries past, the largest such gathering was at Arattupuzha, some 14 kilometers away. At some point in the later 18th century, however, the participants of the Arattupuzha Pooram were late in arriving for the celebration due to heavy rains that delayed their trip. They were denied entrance to the festival. Offended, the local ruler of Thrissur organized a separate celebration. In 1790, His Highness Ramavarma Raja, popularly known as Sakthan Thampuran (1751–1805) became the Maharaja of Kochi, and he proceeded to put his weight behind the Thrissur Pooram and built it into a mass festival. He organized the festival in its present form in front of Vadakkumnathan, the oldest temple in the area, with the primary participants being the people of the 10 major temples in the area. Over the years, especially since Indian independence, the festival has grown and secularized with professional artists and the use of a cadre of elephants.

The Thrissur Pooram is centered on the Vadakkumnathan Temple, located in the middle of Thrissur and celebrated in the month of Medom on the local calendar (April–May on the Common Era calendar). The 10 temples that officially participate each send several elaborately decorated elephants on processions accompanied by drummers and musicians from their temple to the assembly point at the Vadakkumnathan temple. The 36-hour festival includes parasol displays, dramatic productions, concerts, and a fireworks show that lasts for several hours. Interest in the festival is built by the friendly rivalry of the temples, which are divided geographically into two competing divisions that vie in creating the most spectacular fireworks and the most colorful decoration for the elephants.

Each group may display up to 15 elephants, and the temples attempt to secure the best animals available in southern India for the event. The elephants are in turn richly decorated to serve as the transportation of the deities to be assembled for the festival. The festival reaches its climax at 2:30 in the early morning, with the final fireworks show and the display of the 30 elephants.

There are a number of Pooram celebrations in Kerala, but none match the display of the one at Thrissur.

Constance A. Jones

See also Elephant Festival.

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Posadas, Las

Las Posadas (the Inns) is a nine-day Advent celebration most popularly celebrated in Mexico, which has also spread throughout Latin America and among Spanish-speaking communities in North America. It occurs the nine days immediately before Christmas (December 16–24) and dramatizes the trials faced by Jesus’s parents Mary and Joseph in traveling to his birthplace in Bethlehem and locating a place to stay. The celebration is based on the New Testament Gospel of Luke (2:1–7):

Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to enroll themselves, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enroll himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child. And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In this celebration built around the children, the attempt by Mary and Joseph to find a space to stay in Bethlehem is acted out with the children going from house to house while singing an appropriate seasonal song and asking the residents of neighboring houses (who act as innkeepers) for a place to stay. The children carry candles and small statues of Mary, Joseph, and a donkey. Each innkeeper refuses lodging until the children arrive at a prearranged home where they are welcomed

in, and a party follows. Once inside, they gather around a nativity scene and offer prayer. The party that follows includes time to break open the colorful paper-maché piñatas.

In any given location, there will be multiple Posadas parties each evening, with each family choosing a night to host the party at their home. On December 24, the festivities will end in time for all to attend the midnight Mass at the local church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Advent; Christmas.

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Poson

Poson is a Buddhist holiday unique to Sri Lanka that commemorates the arrival of Buddhism in the island nation. Prior to the time of King Ashoka's (c. 304–232 BCE) uniting of much of India under his rule, Buddhism had been a relatively small religious movement. Following Asoka's conversion, however, it began a period of rapid expansion. A key event in that expansion, toward the middle of the third century BCE, Asoka sent his son Mahinda, accompanied by a cadre of Buddhist monks, to Sri Lanka. The holiday is celebrated on the full moon near the summer solstice, during what is now the month of June in the Western calendar.

Mahinda is said to have delivered his first discourse to King Devanampiyatissa (c. 250–210 BCE) at Mihintale (the present Missaka Pawwa), located some eight miles from the ancient capital at Anuradhapura. The year 247 BCE is generally accepted as the date of the king's conversion, which came after Mahinda satisfied himself that Devanampiyatissa had mastered the teaching of Buddhism and was a wise ruler. Mahinda would subsequently spend the rest of his life establishing the faith and overseeing the construction of temples across the island. Theravada Buddhism became wedded to Sri Lankan politics and culture. Today, the Sri Lankan constitution requires that the head of state be a Buddhist.

Mahinda was soon joined by his sister Sanghamitta (280–220 BCE). According to the story, Queen Anula, the wife of one of the island's sub-kings, requested Mahinda to accept a nun (a bhiksuni). Since he lacked the power to receive her into the religious life, he requested that his father send Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka, and that she bring with her a branch of the Bodhi Tree, under which Gautama Buddha had received enlightenment. As recorded in the *Mahavamsa*, Sri Lanka's ancient chronicle, Sanghamitta arrived, accompanied by several sister bhiksunis,

at Jambukolapattana (today called Point Pedro), and joined in a formal procession to Anuradhapura, where the Bodhi Tree would be planted in a previously prepared spot. In due time, Sanghamitta ordained Anula and a group of 500 women, an important event in the history of Buddhist women. Sri Lankan nuns would later become the source of the movement in China.

Poson is celebrated across Sri Lanka (and among Sri Lankans abroad) with a variety of cultural and religious events, including processions and carnivals. Mihintale and Anuradhapura, where Mahinda is buried, remain the focal points of Buddhist pilgrimage and devotion during Poson time. In addition, Sanghamitta is also honored with her own separate celebration, Sanghamitta Day, celebrated on the full moon in the month of December. Though Buddhism dates its beginning in Sri Lanka with the arrival of Mahinda, according to Sri Lankan tradition, Buddha himself had also visited the island during his earthly lifetime on three occasions—during the fifth month, the fifth year, and eighth year of his enlightenment—and among the country's proudest processions are some relics of the Buddha, especially a tooth kept in a golden stupa at the capital, Kandy, a popular site for celebratory gatherings.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Duruthu Poya; Festival of the Tooth; Sanghamitta Day; Summer Solstice; Wesak/Vesak.

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Potlatch

The Potlatch is an essential ceremony of the religious life of the Native peoples of the Northwest of the United States, British Columbia, and Alaska. The term "potlatch" is from a word of the Chinook people of Washington State, meaning "to give away." The ceremony serves a spectrum of purposes among the many different people who utilize it. Among the Athabascan people of Alaska, it provides a means of fellowship among the often isolated small groups in which they live and a way of memorializing those who have died. In Washington, it is a means of manifesting wealth in the act of giving it away and thereby of redistributing it.

Those throwing the potlatch will prepare a feast for the attendees and, as the party atmosphere continues, will distribute the majority of their possessions, with some understanding that they will be on the receiving end as each of the attendees in turn throw their own potlatch.

While the giving aspect of potlatches initially attracted the attention of outside observers, the event is a time for a variety of ritualized behavior. Young girls reaching puberty will go through a name-giving ceremony after which they assume a new adult status indicated by their new name. The gathering may also be a time to acknowledge marriages and hold funerals, erect a totem pole or even a new building, or name an heir. The chiefs who attend potlatches would also allow themselves to be possessed by the spirit whose name they bore and, while entranced, offer dances appropriate to that spirit entity.

When a chief (the head of a clan) died, a cycle of potlatches would be initiated. Following the death, there would be eight days of mourning, in the midst of which the body would be cremated. The clan who had lost their chief would be the host, with the members of the other clans attending as guests. The week would be filled with words, songs, and music, and acts of mourning, all of which culminated in a great feast and gift giving by the hosts to those in attendance. At some point in the next year, a new grave house or mortuary pole would be constructed, and a year after the first mourning event, a second one would be held at which representatives of the other clans would officiate at services formally placing the deceased chief's ashes in its new permanent resting place. The immediate kin of the chief would provide the food and gifts for the event, with other clan members assisting in the arrangements. The original clan would again prepare a feast and offer presents for the officiates' services.

These two connected services became a time to affirm the solidarity of all the clans with each other, and their ancestors, whom they believed would be in attendance in spirit. At the second event, the new chief would be recognized, and all would witness the formal name-title transfer to him. This event would also mark the end of the period of formal mourning by the chief's family.

When initially encountered by European explorers, the potlatches were often elaborate affairs lasting several days, but as governmental authority was extended in the region, potlatches were discouraged. The Canadian Indian Act of 1885, passed in part to assist missionaries attempting to eradicate Indian religious practices, included a provision outlawing potlatches and allowing for imprisonment up to two years if convicted. Potlatches became clandestine affairs always conducted under the threat of police intervention. That law remained in force until 1951.

Among the Athabaskan people of Alaska, an essential element of potlatches was the supplying of moose meat by the host for the feast. A provision of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 aimed at protecting the moose limited hunting it to specified hunting seasons. In spite of a court ruling placing the hunting of moose for funerary and memorial potlatches under



Indian dancers dress in full costume for a potlatch in Chilkat, Alaska, in 1895. (Library of Congress)

constitutional protections of religious freedom, the authorities have periodically prosecuted and jailed people who killed moose for a potlatch feast.

Today, potlatches continue to be held among groups from Oregon to central Alaska, but are usually small one-day affairs.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Acorn Feast; First Salmon Rites; World Peace and Prayer Day.

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Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977) founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which in the last half of the 20th century emerged as the primary organization bringing devotional (bhakti) Vaishnavism to the Western world.

He was born in Calcutta, India, on what on the Western calendar was September 1, 1896. He later attended the University of Calcutta. Though inclined

to the religious life, he bowed to his father's wishes and married and began life as a businessman. Meanwhile, he became a lay follower of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Society and practiced the Bhakti ("devotional") worship of Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna, in the form by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), a Bengali saint of the 16th century. Krishna's life is described in the Hindu scriptural texts Bhagavad Gita and the Srimad-Bhagavatam.

At the age of 58, Prabhupada became a swami, and in 1965, he immigrated to the United States, where he began to accept devotees and to distribute his translation of the Bhagavad Gita. He also worked on completing a translation and commentary on the Srimad-Bhagavatam, the second main text for Krishna devotion. In the next 12 years, he circled the globe 14 times, initiated over 10,000 disciples, and established 108 Krishna temples.

As he taught his devotees, he spent much time chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, and his devotees saw in him a perfect exemplar of what he was teaching them. He passed away of heart failure on November 14, 1977, at the age of 81, at Vrindavana, India, in the heart of the region where Krishna spent his early years. The movement that he founded, primarily represented by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, continued to grow after his death and is currently in more than 70 countries.

Annually, those who see themselves in Prabhupada's lineage honor him. He was born on September 1 on the Common Era calendar, but within the movement he built, his appearance day (or birthday) is kept on the Indian Hindu lunar calendar. In that year of his birth, September 1 was the day after Janmashtami, celebrated by Vaishnava Hindus across India as the Appearance Day of Lord Krishna. That day also happens to be a lesser Vaishnava holiday, the day of Nandotsava, which honors Nanda, Krishna's second father. When Krishna was born, he was sought by his uncle the king, who wanted to kill him. Thus, his real father placed him in the care of Nanda the cow-herder to be raised. He grew to manhood in Nanda's family.

Nandotsava is, relative to the Common Era calendar, a moveable date, being on the ninth day of the waning moon during the Hindu month of Bhadrapad, and thus may occur in the latter part of August or early September. Each year in honor of his appearance day, his disciples publish a *Vyasa-Puja* volume of remembrances. It is also a fast day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Appearance Day of; Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Appearance Day of; Janmashtami; Prabhupada, Disappearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

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Prabhupada, Disappearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

In the 12 years that he worked in the West (1965–1977), A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), the Founder-Acharya of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, made a deep impression on those who became his disciples. Amid the many gurus who came to the West in the 1970s, amid the controversy that adhered to his organization, he was among the few who was free from even the accusation of any personal wrongdoing or moral turpitude. Amid the disagreements about leadership in the movement in later years, all agreed that he was the genuine teacher that he called his disciples to find and follow.

In the aftermath of his passing, his disciples came not only to remember him on his birthday, but his day of passing as well. He died, according to the Common Era calendar, on November 14, 1977, in Vrindavan, in the middle of the holy land of Krishna's birth. But as with their other commemorative dates, the organization he founded keeps their remembrance according to the Indian Hindu calendar. According to that calendar, he died on the fourth day of the waxing moon of the month of Kartika.

This day is primarily for a time for those who knew Swami Prabhupada to share memories of him with each other and with those who did not have the opportunity of knowing him. It occurs on a different date in late October or early November.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Prabhupada, Appearance Day of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

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Prasadji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru (January 6)

Swami Guru Prasadji Paramahansa (b. 1966) is the current leader and fourth guru in the lineage of the Ajapa Yoga Society. He has led the movement since the death

of his father, Swami Guru Janardanji Paramahansa (1888–1980), who adopted him shortly after his birth. He was raised in the atmosphere of the society and, as a youth, learned and mastered the teachings and practice of the Ajapa breathing and meditation. He was only 14 when his father died and left the movement in his care.

Each year on January 6, members of the various ashrams and centers of the society, found in India, Bangladesh, Europe, and North America, gather to celebrate Guru Prasadji's birthday. On each occasion, attendees enjoy a feast and then join in with a time of meditation and prayers. They are asked to bring a flower to place on the altar in the meditation hall, and a dish to share during the meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhumanandaji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Janardanji Paramahansa, Commemoration Days of Swami Guru; Purnanandaji Paramahansa, Commemoration Day for Swami Guru.

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Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the (February 2)

In 1969, when the Roman Catholic Church revised its liturgical calendar in conformity to the suggestions of the second Vatican Council (1962–1965), a new feast appeared for February 2, the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. This change gave a direction for a variety of celebrations that have occurred on this day going back to the pre-Christian era, when Pagan culture in Europe celebrated the day as the beginning of spring. This day was, for example, called Oimble in Ireland. In the fourth century, following the legalization and privileging of Christianity, discussions were held on how the Christian movement might commemorate the events of Luke 2:22–33:

And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord), and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law, then he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, “Now let your servant depart, Lord, According to thy word, in peace; For mine eyes have seen your salvation, Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples; A light for revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of thy people Israel.” And his father and his mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning him.

According to Jewish law, following childbirth, the new mother must wait 40 days before visiting temple, and must before joining in worship present sacrifices in the form of a two pigeons (a provision that allowed the poor, who could not afford a lamb, to meet the demands of the law). The important happening during this event concerned a man named Simeon, who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Promised Messiah. Upon meeting the Blessed Virgin and her child, he took Jesus in his arms and said, “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, For my eyes have seen your salvation” (v. 29–30). There was also an elderly woman, a prophetess, named Anna who, upon seeing the child, offered prayers of thanks to God for Jesus and addressed the other temple goers concerning him (v. 36–38).

Given that the residence of Jesus’s family was in Nazareth, a trip to the temple in Jerusalem was a major event in their life. The many details in Luke’s account elevated the event, which is presented as another prophecy of Jesus’s coming activity for human salvation.

It was already an established observance in the Eastern Mediterranean, celebrated some 40 days after Christmas, when the church attained legal status in the Roman Empire under Constantine. At the time, many Christians in the East celebrated the birth of Jesus on January 6 (now Epiphany, a celebration of the Three Magi) and thus celebrated Jesus’s entrance into the temple on February 14. In the discussion over the dating of Christmas late in the fourth century, December 25 was chosen, and the feast of the Presentation was moved to February 2. As the liturgical calendar developed in the West, the focus of the feast was transformed and the emphasis placed on Mary’s purification. In 701, Pope Sergius I (r. 687–701) prescribed a candlelit procession as part of each of the Marian festivals then observed in Rome. Later in the century, priests in Carolingian France introduced the practice of blessing candles on this day. The use of candles in the worship service on this day placed a focus on Simeon’s terming Jesus “A light for revelation to the Gentiles.” As this practice grew and evolved, the day came to be called Candlemas, and the blessing of the new candles for the new year was a primary activity. Some people would keep a blessed candle to use when a storm arose or when they confronted a particularly frightening situation in the dark.

In Ireland, where the ancient Celtic goddess Brigid had been honored on February 2, her place would be taken by Saint Brigid of Ireland (c. 452–c. 524),

who founded an early Irish monastery over a Pagan temple site. Saint Brigid's feast day is now set for February 1, and its observation now flows into Candlemas.

With the 1969 changes in the Roman liturgical calendar, the Western church realigns with the Eastern churches, which have continued to focus the day on Jesus rather than Mary. In the Greek and Syrian churches, for example, the emphasis has been on Simeon's taking Jesus in his arms and proclaiming him the Light unto the Gentiles.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St.; Christmas; Epiphany; Imbolc.

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Presentation of Mary, Feast of the (November 21)

The feast of the Presentation of Mary commemorates an event in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary not recorded in the Bible, but mentioned in several extra-biblical texts, most notably the *Protoevangelium of James* (also known as *The Nativity of Mary* or the *Infancy Gospel of James*). This apocryphal gospel tells of a couple, Joachim and Anne, who, finding themselves childless after some years of marriage, received a revelation that they would finally become parents. In due time, a female child, whom they named Mary, was born. In gratitude, they took her to the temple in Jerusalem and consecrated her to God. That act included their leaving her at the temple, where she was raised in a manner that prepared her for her later role as the mother of Jesus. After reaching puberty, she was assigned to Joseph as her new guardian. This story is also recounted, with some variations, in such writings as the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (also known as *The Book about the Origin of the Blessed Mary and the Childhood of the Savior*).

The status of Mary within church thinking was significantly increased by the declaration of her as *Theotokos*, or Mother of God, by a church council in 431. The celebration of this particular moment in her life was occasioned by the dedication of the Basilica of Saint Mary the New, erected in Jerusalem in 543 during the lengthy reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565). From Jerusalem, it spread rather quickly through the Eastern Church and was able to survive the destruction of the basilica following the Persian capturing of Jerusalem in 614.

The feast was slow to gain favor in the West, but in 1372, Pope Gregory XI (r. 1370–1378), then residing in Avignon, France, introduced the feast into the

annual celebration at his papal chapel. The feast would then be suppressed in 1372 by Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572), as part of the liturgical revision during the Catholic Counter-Reformation. It disappeared for only a few years, however, as Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585–1590) reintroduced it on to the Roman calendar among a variety of revisions he made to his predecessor's work. More recently, the feast survived the post-Vatican changes in the Roman calendar made by Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) in 1969.

In 1775, Nano Nagle (1718–1784), a young woman from a well-to-do Irish family, led in the founding of a new order of Catholic sisters, devoted to serving the needy children of the city of Cork. Originally named the Society of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it would later be renamed as the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Several years later in France, where religious activity was also suspect, a woman named Marie Rivier (1768–1838) assembled a small group of women who, on the feast day of the Presentation of Mary in 1776, formed themselves into a new religious order later to be known as the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Anne, Feast Day of St.; Annunciation, Feast of the; Christmas; Expectation of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the.

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Procession de la Penitencia, La (Spain)

The Procession of the Penitents (La Procession de al Penitencia) is an annual event at Roncesvalles, a town in northern Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains, near the French border. Roncesvalle has for centuries been a site on the path of pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain.

The procession at Roncesvalles is reenacted on each of five days immediately before Pentecost Sunday each year. The procession's beginning has been lost to history, but is tied to some 23 families in the distant past who wished to find a means of atoning for their sins in the previous year. In the mountains above the town, at the end of a steep pathway, lies the monastery of Roncesvalles. The families decided on a penitential trek up the pathway to the monastery as the solution

to their problem. Over the years, they were joined by others wishing to make the walk with them.

Today, the procession is carried out by people from each of five nearby villages, with villagers from a single village making the trip each day. The penitents dress in black robes, with hoods covering their head. They have a large cross tied to their back. The crosses are large enough that the person has to stretch out his arms to help carry it. The trek is about two miles in length, and once at the monastery, they attend a Mass led by the brothers.

J. Gordon Melton

See also James the Greater, Feast Day of St.; Procession of the Fugenti; Procession of the Holy Blood.

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Procession of Penitents (July)

On the last Sunday in July, the small Belgian town of Veurne is the site of an annual Procession of Penitents that recalls the country’s many years under Spanish control. The procession traces its history to 1637 and to Jacob Clou, a monk of the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré (popularly called the Norbertines). Clou founded a religious fraternity called a soldarity, whose members in 1644 marched in a procession that had been organized to protect the area from war and the plague. In the procession, Clou and his associates wore hoods and carried crosses (some weighing 50 pounds or more). The original procession has been continued annually. While at most times it has been focused on personal penitence issues, at different times through the years, it has found a focus in larger cultural issues that have most affected the church—the French Revolution, two world wars, and modern secularism, to name a few.

The modern procession moves through the streets of Beurne from Saint Walburga Church on one side of town to Saint Nicholas Church on the other. It includes two distinct elements. Leading the procession is a set of living Bible scenes. Each scene is introduced by a person dressed as an angel carrying a sign naming the scene to be enacted. Penitents pull a stage on which costumed actors offer their interpretation of the particular occurrence from the Bible. In the 1960s, the artist Arno Brys was commissioned to create new costumes, which were created slowly over the next two decades. In 1987, on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of Fr. Clou’s Soldarity, the new costumes were worn by the actors.

The rather lighthearted first part of the procession eventually gives way to the more sober second part, in which the penitents, all of whom had made formal application to march, come by, their face covered with a hood and carrying a large cross. On any given year, as many as 400 will make the long walk between the two churches.

The Procession of Penitents occurs in the afternoon and lasts for several hours.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Procession de la Penitencia, La (Spain); Procession of the Cross; Procession of the Fugenti.

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Procession of the Cross (August 1)

August 1 (on the Julian calendar; August 14 on the Common Era calendar) has been a date of some importance in the Eastern Orthodox churches. In the years after discovery of the True Cross by Saint Helena (c. 248–c. 329), the mother of the emperor Constantine (r. 306–337), part of that cross was kept in Constantinople. As August was a season in which it appeared that the number of illnesses in the city would noticeably increase, a custom was evolved of carrying the Cross through the city in hopes of sanctifying the city and finding relief from all illnesses. On July 31, the wooden relic was taken from the imperial treasury and placed on the altar at the Hagia Sophia church. Beginning on August 1, it would daily be paraded through the city for the next two weeks.

August 1 took on additional meaning in Russia, as on that day in 988, Prince Vladimir and the people were formally baptized into the Christian faith. Then on this day during the reign of the Russian ruler, Prince Andrei I (later known as Saint Andrey Bogolyubsky or Andrey the God-Loving, c. 1111–1174), prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, successfully fought a battle against the Bulgarians. Vladimir-Suzdal was a successor state to Kievan Rus and evolved into the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Prince Andrei built a number of monasteries and churches in Vladimir, his capital city, including Assumption Cathedral, which functioned as the mother church of Russia through the 13th century.

The story is told that at one point he went to war with the Pagan forces in Bulgaria. As the decisive battle approached, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin Mary and then order the troops to carry the Cross and some icons before the troops as they

marched into the fight. Shortly thereafter, around 1168, the commemoration of the victory was added to the church calendar.

Thus, within the Russian Church, the celebration of the Procession of the Cross has been combined into a day to remind the faithful that the pioneers of the faith received Christianity by the water of baptism and the assurance of salvation by the cross. Thus, believers are called to a rededication to the faith received from the founders of Christianity.

On this day, the cross will be brought into the center of the sanctuary and, where appropriate after the service, will lead a procession through the streets of the town. The priest will at the same time bless the people with holy water that was consecrated just prior to the beginning of the worship time.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross; Procession of Penitents.

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Procession of the Fujenti

Every year, on Easter Monday (the day after Easter), as many as 100,000 Italian pilgrims make their way to the Church of Saint Anastasia and its sanctuary to the Madonna dell'Arco, the virgin with the wounded face. The most devoted of the pilgrims are called the *fujenti* (people who run). They will walk the 12 kilometers from Naples, many with bare feet, and actually run the last leg of the pilgrimage.

The story is told that on Easter Monday in the year 1500, a mallet player upset with his poor performance assaulted the image of the Virgin with a wooden ball. In response, the image of the Virgin began to bleed, the mallet player ran away in fright, but the bleeding was received by others as miraculous, and the image soon became the object of a growing devotion. It is believed that the barefoot running of the *fujenti* originated as a means of recalling the action of the mallet player.

The *fujenti* are members of associations of devotees that are active across Italy. They dress all in white to signify purity. They then place a blue strip of cloth across their chest (blue being the color most associated with Mary) and a red strip on their hips (signifying blood). Every association selects a group who together carry a *tosello*, a heavy festival display with a statue of the Madonna dell'Arco

on her throne. The association will enter the procession as a group led by a banner with their name on it, the *tosello*, and then the uniformly clad members.

The procession begins at sunrise in Naples. When they reach the sanctuary, many are observed in a state of trance or ecstasy. Many *ex voto* offerings are delivered to the image.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter Monday; Procession de la Penitencia, La (Spain); Procession of the Holy Blood.

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Procession of the Holy Blood (May)

On Ascension Day (the sixth Thursday after Easter) each May, visitors to and citizens of the city of Bruges, Belgium, participate in an annual pageant in which a bottle believed to contain the blood of Jesus Christ is carried through the city. According to tradition, Derrick of Alsace, a.k.a. Thierry d’Alsace (1099–1168), count of Flanders, brought some drops of Jesus’s blood with him after the Second Crusade. Derrick was reputedly given the relic because of his heroic fighting during the crusade. The gift came from his brother-in-law, Baldwin III of Anjou, king of Jerusalem, in 1150 who had received the approval of the patriarch of Jerusalem. Derrick arrived home in Bruges on April 7, 1150, and placed the relic to the chapel in the city that he himself had built.

The earliest mention of an annual procession in Bruges is from a charter of the Unloaders’ Guild 1291. The oldest document concerning a relic of the Holy Blood being in Bruges dates only to 1256. This document raises the possibility for another origin of the blood. In 1203, Constantinople, where numerous Christian relics had been accumulated, became the target of frustrated crusaders unable to reach Jerusalem. They sacked the city in 1204. Baldwin IX, count of Flanders (1172–1205), assumed the emperor’s throne. Though only in power a year, he had ample time to locate some important relics and have them shipped to Europe, with Bruges as a final destination. There is every reason to believe the relic of the Holy Blood reached Bruges through Baldwin’s actions.

It is also the case that bottle that contains the substance, which is believed to be blood, is made of crystal that seems to date to the 11th or 12th century. In all likelihood, it too probably originated in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) as a container for perfume.

The modern procession begins at the Chapelle du Saint Sang and heads through the city to the Cathedral of Saint Sauveur. There are many floats in the procession, each relating to a biblical story or historical event (such as the traditional scene of the count of Flanders delivering the blood relic in the 12th century. Accompanying the floats are marchers on foot and horsemen who weave in and out of the scenes in the floats giving the appearance of engaging in historical reenactments. Also, many pilgrims join in the procession.

The high point of the procession is the vial of blood itself, which is contained in a gold reliquary. When the procession reaches the cathedral, the reliquary is placed on the altar and a Pontifical Mass is celebrated. The service culminates in the bishop lifting the blood for all to see. It is then returned to the chapel.

Through the year, the vial of blood is kept in the Chapelle du Saint Sang located on the central square in Bruges. The church, originally built in the 12th century, had a second story added in the 15th century. The blood, originally kept on what is now the ground level, currently rests on a silver altar in the church's upper level. It is on public view each Friday and every day from May 3 through May 17. Adjacent to the church is a museum that details the story of the Holy Blood.

Today, not only is the story of the vial of blood arriving in the 12th century doubted, but many have challenged the idea that a relic such as the blood of Jesus exists, and find no evidence to back up any tradition that Joseph of Arimathea, the person mentioned in the Bible as facilitating the burial of Jesus after the crucifixion, wiped blood spilled by Jesus at the crucifixion on a cloth that he saved and passed it on to be preserved through the centuries.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Procession of the Fugenti; Procession de la Penitencia, La (Spain).

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Prompt Succor, Feast Day of Our Lady of (January 8)

The Feast Day of Our Lady of Prompt Succor is one of the important days on the annual calendar of commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary within the Roman Catholic Church. Our Lady of Prompt Succor is a title for Mary that originated in New Orleans at the beginning of the 19th century. The 1763 Treaty of Paris ceded Louisiana to Spain. Responding to the change of civil authorities, the Ursuline Sisters from Spain moved to New Orleans to assist in the work initially founded by the French Ursulines. When France resumed control of New Orleans under Napoleon in 1800, the Spanish sisters moved to Cuba.

With only a few sisters left in New Orleans, the work was in trouble, and with the antipapal policies of Napoleon in effect, the possibilities of getting authorization for more sisters to move from France was in doubt. The mother superior in New Orleans wrote a friend in France, Mother Saint Michel for help. Mother Saint Michel was at the time running a board school, having been driven from her convent by the French Revolution. As she wished to move to Louisiana to assist the Ursuline mission, Mother Saint Michel appealed to Mary, promising to establish veneration of her in New Orleans under the name of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. She put her promise into effect after arriving in 1810. While preparing for her move, she had a statue of Mary commissioned and brought it with her. The statue would soon be credited with saving the convent from damage during the fire that swept the French Quarter in 1812 and from the effects of the Battle of New Orleans fought in 1815. In 1828, a shrine for the statue was built in New Orleans.

Acknowledgment of Our Lady of Prompt Succor spread back to Europe, and in 1851, just three years before his defining of the Immaculate Conception of Mary as church dogma, Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) authorized the feast of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. His successor, Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903), authorized the formal crowning of the statue.

Today, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Succor is celebrated on January 8 with a special thanksgiving Mass. A number of churches across the United States and around the world are named in her honor.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Good Remedy, Feast of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Perpetual Help, Feast of Our Lady of; Rosary, Feast of our Lady of the.

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Pure Brightness Festival

The Pure Brightness Festival is one of the minority of Chinese festivals tied to the solar year rather than to the lunar calendar. It is held 107 days after the winter solstice (and 15 days after the spring equinox, hence it is always April 4 or 5 on the Western or Common Era calendar. It is preceded by what is designated Cold Food Day. As practiced, it has become another day to especially honor one's ancestors.



A man walks past decorated headstones during Qingming, a Chinese grave-sweeping festival organized to honor deceased relatives. (AP/Wide World Photos)

As the story told of Pure Brightness Day goes, a prince of the state of Jin, a power province in the feudal world of northern China's Spring and Autumn Period (722–403 BCE), neglected to reward one of the men who had stood by him in a time of exile prior to his attaining the throne. The man, Jie Zitui, had retired to live quietly on Mian Mountain. Realizing his lack of gratitude, the prince sought out his former companion, but was unable to locate him. A courtier suggested burning the mountainside to force him out, but no Jie Zitui appeared. Further searching found him, and his mother, dead beneath a willow tree. To commemorate his former companion, the prince ordered that the day would henceforth be remembered as the Hanshi Festival and order that no fires be kindled on that day—hence, the

eating of cold food. The tree under which Jie Zitui was found was named Pure Bright Willow, and the day after the Hanshi Festival named the Pure Bright Day.

In China, including Taiwan, the Hanshi Festival has largely been neglected, but the Pure Bright Festival is widely celebrated and acknowledged as the first day of the year when one can leave the confinement to the house during the winter and enjoy the outdoors. It is also a popular time to acknowledge one's ancestors by going to their tombs, making necessary repairs, and cleaning them of any clutter or trash accumulated through the winter. Thus, Pure Brightness Day is often termed Tomb Sweeping Day. Before leaving, people will also commonly burn what is called spirit money. Such money is printed especially for burning, hence sending into the spirit world, for the use of the spirits of the dead. It is also a day to think about willow trees. Some plant new willow trees. Others decorate them with model birds made of flour and dates, and called Zitui swallows.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Obon Festival(s); Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Winter Solstice.

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Purification of Mary, Feast of the. See Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the

Purim

Purim is an annual Jewish festival that celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people of the ancient Persian Empire from a plot to annihilate them. The story is recorded in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) in the Book of Esther. In the past, the king Ahasuerus described in the story was believed to be either Ataxerxes I (r. 465–424 BCE) or Ataxerxes II (r. 404–358). More recently, scholars have been more skeptical of the historicity of the story and have seen it more as a legendary tale.

The Book of Esther begins with the account of a feast given by King Ahasuerus at which alcohol flowed freely. In a drunken state, the king ordered his wife Vashti, wearing her crown, to “display her beauty” before those in attendance. Her refusal to do so caused Ahasuerus to put her away and to choose a new wife and queen. He chose a young woman at the court named Esther, unaware that she was, in fact, a Jewish orphan named Hassassah now in the care of her cousin Mordecai. Soon afterward, Mordecai discovered a plot by several courtiers to kill Ahasuerus. He made the plot public.

Haman, the king’s highest official, came to despise Mordecai, for he refused to bow down to Haman. Haman discovered that Mordecai was Jewish and hatched a plot to kill not only him, but the entire Jewish minority in the Persian Empire. After obtaining Ahasuerus’s permission to go ahead with his plan, Haman cast lots (*purim*) to choose the date for executing it. The lot fell on the 13th day of the month of Adar. When Mordecai discovered Haman’s plan, he informed Esther. She asked the Jewish community to engage in three days of fasting and prayer, and then requested an audience with Ahasuerus, even though to do so, without the king having summoned her, could have caused her death. But Esther found favor when the king saw her, and she invited the king and Haman to a feast. At this feast, she invited them to a second feast the next day.

On the night between the two feasts, Ahasuerus had trouble sleeping, and he asked that the annals be read to him. Learning that Mordecai had foiled a plot against him and that he had received no honor in return, the king asked Haman how properly to reward a man the king wished to honor. Thinking it was he himself of whom the king spoke, Haman replied that the man should be dressed in a

kingly fashion and paraded on the king's horse. Haman, to his great despair, had then to do these things for Mordecai.

That evening, at the feast, Esther revealed that she was a Jew and informed the king of Haman's plot. She pointed out that if his plot were carried out, she would be executed. Ahasuerus then turned on Haman and ordered him hung. But a problem remained. The decree allowing Haman's action against the Jews had been signed; thus it could not be simply annulled—but it could be countered. Ahasuerus gave Esther and Mordecai leave to write a new decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves. When attacked on Adar 13, the Jewish community fought and triumphed over its enemies. Mordecai subsequently was given a prominent position in Ahasuerus's court. He initiated the annual commemoration of the Jewish people's deliverance.

Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (usually in mid-March on the Common Era calendar). In leap years, when a second month of Adar is added to the Hebrew lunar calendar (seven times in a 19-year cycle), so that holidays stay in their appointed seasons, Purim is celebrated during Adar II. This is the most unequivocally joyous of Jewish festivals, though it begins on Adar 13 with, *Taanit Esther*, a fast (as Esther had asked the Jews to fast before she went to the king). If Adar 13 falls on a Sabbath, there will be further adjustment of the date.

Ritually, the service at the synagogue will feature a reading of the biblical book of Esther. This occurs twice, first after sunset when the new day begins on the Hebrew calendar, and a second time the next morning. In contrast to the quiet demeanor during the scripture readings at Sabbath services, during the reading of the Book of Esther, the congregation shouts and makes noise whenever Haman's name is read so as to blot out the sound of his name. Central to the day is a feast, which has been preceded by the sharing of gifts of food with others and the giving of money to the poor, with the understanding that joy is complete only when shared with the less fortunate. Additional customs have also developed above and beyond the guidelines of the biblical story, including the making of a particular dessert called *hamantaschen* (or "Haman's pockets"), a fruit-filled pastry. Purim is one day in which the drinking of alcohol in excess is acceptable.

The story of Esther is also commemorated as a teaching event. It reminds believers of the capricious nature of evil in the world and the need for action when it arises. It also builds confidence that God does not neglect his people.

From the Middle Ages to the present, Purim has, on occasion, been used, usually as part of a larger anti-Semitic attack, to charge the Jews either with the excessive use of violence or, on occasion, with the inability to respond to violence directed at them (as occurred in the Holocaust). Historic persecutions of the Jews and ongoing tensions with the Arab world since the founding of the state of Israel continue to provide occasions for Jews to construe anew the meaning of Purim and the tyranny of new Hamans who seek their destruction.

Purim is an official holiday in Israel.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Common Era Calendar; Hanukkah; Pesach.

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Purnanandaji Paramahansa, Commemoration Day for Swami Guru (September 14)

Swami Guru Purnanandaji Paramahansa (1834–1928) began the modern tradition of teaching Ajapa yoga, an ancient secret yoga system that members of the Ajapa Yoga Society believed was preserved over the centuries at a hidden monastery in Tibet. In the 1860s, he made his way to Tibet and learned the techniques of the system based in breathing and meditation and upon his return to India began to teach it to his followers. He died in 1928, but was succeeded by Swami Guru Bhumanandaji Paramahansa (1873–1958), who passed the lineage to the successive leaders of the Ajapa Yoga Society.

Members of the society remember Swami Guru Purnanandaji on September 14 each year at their various ashrams and centers, of which there were (in 2010) three ashrams in India, one in Bangladesh, and one in California. There are also Ajapa centers located in New York, Honolulu, Montreal, Germany, and Poland. Disciples and friends of the society are invited to the celebration, which will include a feast and then a time of meditation and prayers. Attendees are asked to bring a flower, which will be placed on the altar in the meditation hall, and a dish to share during the meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bhumanandaji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Janardanji Paramahansa, Commemoration Days of Swami Guru; Prasadji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru.

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Puthandu. See New Year's Day (India)

Putrada Ekadashi

The 12 months of the Indian Hindu lunar calendar is divided into halves relative to the waxing and waning moon. The 11th day of the 24 half months is considered by Vaishnava Hindus as a day for fasting and offering puja worship to Lord Vishnu in the local temple. The Putrada Ekadashi is the fast day that occurs during the waxing moon in the month of Shrāvan (December–January on the Common Era calendar). The primary story recounting its importance is found in one of the Hindu holy texts, the Bhavisya Uttara Purana, in a conversation between Lord Krishna and Maharaj Udhister.

Krishna told of an ancient king named Suketumana who ruled a city called Bhadravati. He and his queen Saivya had produced no sons, a matter that became extremely distressful. They had no one to whom they could leave their kingdom, and feared that upon their deaths there would be no one who would continue to offer oblations to their ancestors. Both were deeply religious, which left them wondering about the value of their piety.

Eventually, the depression into which the king fell led to his quitting the palace and going to the nearby forest. In his self-pity, he found his way to a beautiful lake. He found a small group of sages, and to each he offered obeisance. They in returned asked if he sought a blessing. They noted that the day was a fasting day, the auspicious Putrada Ekadashi. If anyone desiring a son will fast on this day, they will be blessed with a male child. The king immediately observed the fast and the next day after again offering obeisance to each of the sages returned home. A short time later, the queen became pregnant and bore a son. Krishna's point in telling the story was to assert that through observing Putrada Ekadashi, one can get a son and attain other rewards.

The Putrada Ekadashi includes a 24-hour abstinence from all grains, beans, cereals, and certain vegetables and spices. It is not as severe as the Nirjala Ekadashi, which requires abstinence also from liquids, even water. Observance of the Putrada Ekadashi is primarily among Vaishnava Hindus.

Constance A. Jones

See also Amalaka Ekadashi; Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Mokshada Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Qing Ming Festival. See Pure Brightness Festival

Queenship of Mary, Feast of

The elevation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the role of importance now given her within both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches began in the fourth century, at the beginning of which Christianity was decriminalized and made the privileged religion throughout the Roman Empire. At this time, decision making in the church was focused on the new capital at Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). In the wake of the changed status of the Christian church, church leaders devoted increased amounts of time to the defining of Christian doctrine. Much of the effort came at working out the problem of how it might speak of Jesus as divine without taking away from its affirmation of a strict monotheism. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirmed God's threefold nature, and dual nature of Jesus Christ as both fully human and divine.

If Jesus was born both human and divine, some reasoned that Mary could correctly be spoken of as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, the instrument by which God incarnated in Jesus. This concept was accepted by the church's bishop at the council held at Ephesus in 451 CE. That the doctrine was proclaimed at Ephesus was not lost on the local population, as Ephesus was the site of the magnificent temple to the Greek goddess Diana (one of the wonders of the ancient world). The designation by an Ecumenical Council of Mary as *Theotokos* would be the foundation upon which future speculation on the role of Mary in God's plan of human salvation would rest.

The idea of the Blessed Virgin as Queen of Heaven is a direct extension of her designation as *Theotokos*. In earthly kingdoms, the mother of the ruler is honored as the queen, so given Jesus's kingship in heaven, Mary should be honored as queen. This line of development in the understanding of the role of Mary was initially developed in the East, and often expressed with the placement of a gold crown in icons picturing the Virgin. In the West, this practice often took the form of crowning statues of Mary.

The doctrine of Mary's Queenship took a leap forward in the 16th century with the circulation of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (a.k.a. Litany of Loretto), a worship format initially used at Loretto, where many Catholics believe the house in which Mary bore Jesus was transported to Italy by angels in 1291 to protect it from the emergent Ottoman Turks. It was given formal approval by Pope

Sixtus V (r. 1585–1590) in 1587. The litany makes various references to Mary as Queen and began the extension of the title Queen, for example, to Mary as Queen of the Angels and Queen of Peace.

Mary as Queen was a widely believed and utilized title for Mary that was integrated into the revived interest in mariology in the late 20th century. It was closely associated with the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin into heaven. Further consideration of Mary's status culminated in 1954 with the issuance of the encyclical *Ad caeli reginam* by Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1968) on October 11, the feast of the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He proclaimed the doctrine of Queenship of Mary as a teaching of the church (though not a dogma) and established the established the feast day of the Queenship of Mary.

The feast of Mary as Queen of Heaven was first celebrated on May 31, 1955, but in 1969, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) changed the feast day to August 22, the Feast of the Visitation (of Mary with Elizabeth) having been moved to May 31. The feast day is celebrated with special prayers in the liturgy and opportunity for personal contemplation of the meaning of Mary's Queenship in the salvation of the world. August 22 and the Sunday closest to it will be especially celebrated in the many local churches named for Mary Queen of Heaven. Pope Pius XII related the role of Mary as Queen of Heaven to the cause of those persecuted for their faith and deprived of the freedom to practice their faith.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fatima, Feast Day of Our Lady of; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the; Visitation, Feast of the.

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R

Race Unity Day

Race Unity Day (called “Race Amity Day” until 1965) was inaugurated in 1957 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States (US-NSA), the annually elected governing council of the American Bahá’í community, to promote racial harmony and understanding. While it is a Bahá’í-sponsored occasion, it is not a Bahá’í holy day (nor is it even a “religious” event), yet is observed worldwide as an outgrowth of Bahá’í principles of interracial harmony and as an outreach to the wider community to foster a warm embrace of the social fact of ever-increasing diversity. For instance, a “National Race Amity Conference” was held on June 10–12, 2011, at Wheelock College in Boston, culminating in the first Boston Race Amity Day Celebration on Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway on June 12. William “Smitty” Smith, EdD, executive director of Wheelock’s National Center for Race Amity, has sent to all members of the U.S. Congress a proposed Joint Resolution of Congress to “[d]eclare the 2nd Sunday in June annually be designated as National Race Amity Day.”

Although not a “holy day” in the formal sense, Race Unity Day may be seen as contributing to what some scholars call “civil religion” as part of shared cultural values that progress over time. Although the term “civil religion” is commonplace among scholars of religion, the term “civil religious holy day” may be an apt neologism by which to characterize Race Unity Day as a cultural event, in which the sacred Bahá’í values of unity are secularized and thereby transposed into the civic sphere.

Like World Religion Day, another observance conceived and “invented” by the US-NSA, as it were, this community event is universal in that it is not specifically a “Bahá’í” observance, but can be more widely appreciated and participated in. As an US-NSA-inspired “civil religious holy day” (to use the author’s term), Race Unity Day has apparently provided a model that appears to have inspired its secular namesake, sponsored by the government of New Zealand.

Usually celebrated annually on the second Sunday in June in the United States, Race Unity Day events have, not infrequently, been accompanied by mayoral proclamations. One of the early observances of Race Amity Day was in San Antonio, Texas, where the event was reported by the *San Antonio Register* on June 6, 1958. Today, Race Unity Day events in the United States are typically the product of local community initiatives, rather than a response to direct encouragement from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States.

On June 6, 2010, for instance, Bahá'ís in Springfield, Illinois, cosponsored the 13th annual “Race Unity Rally” at the state capitol. This celebration included performances by the Kuumba Dancers, Bahá'í African American drummers, and other musicians. Children were publicly recognized as winners in the sixth annual Vision of Race Unity Art and Poetry Contest. The 2010 event was cosponsored “by Frontiers International Club of Springfield, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the Greater Springfield Baha’i community, the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, and Springfield’s Lincoln Library.”

The 32nd Annual Race Unity Day, sponsored by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was held on June 13, 2010, at the City Island Pavilion to “promote religious, racial, and cultural harmony.” In Burke, Virginia, the 14th annual “Race for Race Unity 5M” took place that Sunday in Burke Lake Park in order to raise funds for “Health for Humanity” (a humanitarian organization that provides training for health professionals in emerging and developing countries through partnerships with existing health institutions around the world).

The Blount County Race Unity Day was held at the Everett Center in Maryville, Tennessee. The Bahá'ís of Savannah, Georgia, had their annual Race Unity Picnic on June 13, 2010. In Erie, Pennsylvania, the “Race Unity Picnic” at Presque Isle State Park was cosponsored “by members of the Baha’i Faith in the Erie area along with the Race Unity Dialogue Group and Amerimasala Committee.” The same day, the Bahá'ís of Rapid City, South Dakota, had their annual “Oneness of Humanity–Race Unity Day” potluck picnic at Canyon Lake Park, while the Bahá'ís of Fargo, North Dakota, hosted their annual Race Unity Day at Rabanus Park. These are some of the reported Race Unity Day events across the United States.

As previously stated, Race Unity Day was called “Race Amity Day” from 1957 to 1965. “Race amity” was a general expression, during the Jim Crow era, for harmonious race relations. The early American Bahá'ís took a leadership role in promoting “race amity” to the fullest extent possible, including advocating interracial marriage for those who wished to so marry. This was quite radical at that time, since antimiscegenation laws prohibiting interracial marriage existed in many states until they were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1967.

The first Bahá'í-sponsored “Race Amity Conference” was organized by Agnes S. Parsons (a white woman prominent in Washington, D.C., high society) at the instruction of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921; successor to, interpreter, and exemplar of the teachings of the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh [1817–1892]), who, in 1920, said to her: “I want you to arrange in Washington a convention for unity between the white and colored people.” This came as a shock to Mrs. Parsons, who had no prior experience in race relations.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised Parsons not to undertake this activity alone. Accordingly, Parsons consulted with the Washington, D.C. Bahá'í Assembly for advice and called upon several of her friends to form an ad hoc race amity convention committee. Among those whose help she solicited were Howard University professor Alain Locke (1885–1954), who joined the “Bahá'í Cause” (as the Bahá'í Faith was then

known) in 1918, and Louis G. Gregory (1874–1951), a law graduate of Howard University, who was widely known as a lecturer and writer on Bahá'í topics.

The historic “Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings” took place on May 19–21, 1921, at the First Congregational Church in Washington, D.C. Alain Locke chaired the Friday evening, May 20, session, and Louis Gregory was one of a number of speakers—of both races and varied religious backgrounds—who addressed the convention.

Although Locke was not widely known as a professing Bahá'í, he contributed significantly to the Bahá'í “race amity” efforts. Of Locke, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, in his speech at the Poor People’s Campaign Rally on March 19, 1968 in Clarksdale, Mississippi: “We’re going to let our children know that the only philosophers that lived were not Plato and Aristotle, but W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke came through the universe.”

Locke, who devoted his life and career to fostering interracial unity, wrote in 1933: “If they will but see it, because of their complementary qualities, the two racial groups [black and white] have great spiritual need, one of the other.” As Locke said in a speech in 1944: “Just as world-mindedness must dominate and remould [*sic*] nationmindedness, so we must transform eventually race-mindedness into humanmindedness” (see Locke, “Stretching Our Social Mind,” *World Order* 38, no. 3 [2006–2007]: 30). These statements fairly characterize the Bahá'í perspective on interracial unity, more broadly stressed as the “consciousness of the oneness of humankind.”

The success of the Race Amity Convention in Washington led to a series of similar events over the next several years in Springfield, Massachusetts; New York City; and Philadelphia. Beginning in 1927, Bahá'í-sponsored events promoting interracial harmony proliferated, spreading to many cities, large and small, and to other regions of the United States, and sometimes involving collaboration with the Urban League or the NAACP. Louis Gregory came to play a central role in organizing these events in the period from 1927 to 1947. He set a standard that Bahá'ís continued to emulate throughout the last half of the 20th century.

“The Vision of Race Unity: America’s Most Challenging Issue,” the 1991 statement by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States on what Bahá'ís call “America’s most challenging issue” (i.e., racial discrimination), together with the video *The Power of Race Unity* broadcast on the Black Entertainment Network and across the country in 1997, has its roots in early Bahá'í race-relations endeavors.

In a letter dated January 14, 1987, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, the Universal House of Justice (international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, first elected in April 1963 and elected every five years by NSA members worldwide) called for a continuation of the “race amity” efforts which, after all, were called for by none other than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

[T]he House of Justice appreciates the attention you are attempting to give to this situation by your appointment each year of a Race Unity Committee;

however, it has noticed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advice concerning the holding of Race Amity Conferences is not being systematically followed. You are asked, therefore, to give the most careful consideration to reviving the Race Amity Conferences as a regular feature among the activities of your national community. (Taylor, *Pupil of the Eye*, 178–79)

In its letter of April 10, 2011, the Universal House of Justice (administrative authority, elected every five years, of the worldwide Bahá’í community), has emphasized the altered dynamics of prejudice today: “The expressions of racial prejudice have transmuted into forms that are multifaceted, less blatant and more intricate, and thus more intractable.” Because the current Bahá’í emphasis is on neighborhood outreach with devotional meetings, study circles, children’s classes, and junior youth events, Race Unity Day is not presently promoted in Bahá’í communities in the United States, although the U.S. NSA was a major sponsor (along with the *Boston Globe*) of the June 2011 National Race Amity Conference in Boston. Consequently, Race Unity Day may take on a life of its own in the secular sphere, much like World Religion Day, but with continued Bahá’í support at the local level. Although observance of Race Unity Day in the United States has often been replaced by a variety of activities aimed at promoting social unity with a broader focus, it is flourishing now in New Zealand, where it takes place annually in March. This “Race Unity Day,” however, is a New Zealand cultural event rather than a Bahá’í-sponsored event, although local Bahá’í communities certainly involve themselves with local Race Unity Day events as promoters and providers of activities. This includes Bahá’í cosponsorship of the annual “Race Unity Speech Awards,” popular among secondary school students, a competition that is now a joint venture between the Bahá’ís and the New Zealand Police (who furnish the awards money).

“Race Unity Day 2010,” held in Nelson, New Zealand, on March 21, is a notable instance of the practice of the Race Unity Day model. Officially sponsored by the Nelson Multicultural Council, it was a hugely successful event that enjoyed official and popular support. Bahá’í involvement is formally seen in the “2010 Race Unity Speech Award,” which is “sponsored by the New Zealand Bahá’í Community and proudly supported by the Human Rights Commission, the New Zealand Police and the Office of Ethnic Affairs.”

Race Unity Day events in New Zealand, although government-sponsored, are openly cosponsored by the Bahá’ís, among other groups, in what appears to be a phenomenon of joint community efforts. For instance, the Race Unity Day in Whangarei, New Zealand, on March 21, 2009, was “a successful Race Unity Day organised by Settlement Support, the Baha’i community and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) home tutors Northland at Hurupaki Primary School” (Ali, “Why Whangarei Enjoys a Degree of Racial Tolerance”).

Whatever the future may hold for Bahá’í-sponsored “Race Unity Day” events or “Race Amity Conferences,” the emphasis on the oneness of humankind will

continue to animate Bahá'í efforts to bridge the racial divide in bringing about harmony among races, nations and religions. As in the case of New Zealand, the model that the Bahá'ís pioneered is taking root across the globe, as racial reconciliation emerges as a self-evident social imperative. As such, the trajectory of Race Unity Day phenomenologically maps the transition from sacred to secular values.

Race Unity Day is not only about promoting racial amity, but “[i]t’s about empowering people,” according to a Bahá'í organizer of the 2008 event in San Antonio, Texas, where a diverse mix of entertainment included traditional East Indian dance, a “Christian praise dance,” Negro spirituals and country music, following San Antonio city council’s proclamation declaring Saturday, March 21, 2008, “Race Unity Day.” (Ayo, “Race Unity Day Empowers People Personally, Socially.”) As a Bahá'í-inspired “civil religious holy day,” Race Unity Day quickens the civic heart by fostering the social empowerment that interracial harmony engenders.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Martin Luther King Jr., Birthday of; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Radhashtami

The Radhashtami festival is a Vaishnava Hindu celebration of the birthday of the deity Radha, the consort of Krishna. She is a major character in the Bhagavada purana and the Gita Govinda (or Song of Govinda), a work composed by the 12th-century poet Jayadeva. She is most often pictured standing beside Krishna.

In the story of Krishna, as related, for example, in the *Mahabharata*, he spends much of his youth in the village of Vrindavan in northern India, in the company of gopis, young girls who herd cows. These times are described in some detail in Bhagavata Purana. Radha is not mentioned by name in the Bhagavata Purana, though it seemingly alludes to her. Her story is focused upon later in the Gita Govinda, where her life is related in more detail. Krishna is seen as an incarnation of the deity Vishnu and Radha of Lakshmi.

Krishna was born at a time when his uncle King Kamsa sought his death, as Krishna (the eighth son born to Kamsa’s sister) was predicted to kill him. In the process of Kamsa’s searching out the baby Krishna, Radha and the other gopis were taken by the Putana demon. Krishna killed the demon, and the gopis were retrieved and placed in various homes. Radha was given to Brishabanu Maharaja and subsequently grew up in his palace in Barshana.

Within the Vaishnava tradition, Radha is held up for her unconditioned love for Krishna. The 13th-century Vaishnava theologian Nimbarka advocated a form of piety built around the devotion to and worship of Krishna and Radha, pictured as surrounded by thousands of gopis in a celestial Vrindavan. This devotion would be developed by the Bengali saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534) in the 16th century. Chaitanya is believed by the followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, best known in the West from the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, to be the full incarnation of both Lord Krishna and Radha.

Vaishnavas celebrate Radha on Radhashtami, which is held on the eighth day of the waning moon of the Hindu lunar month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar). It is a fast day that begins with a ritual bath. At the temple, Radha’s statue will be bathed with panchamrita—a food mix, made of honey, sugar, milk, yogurt, and ghee, that has a variety of uses in Hindu

worship—and then richly clothed in fresh attire. She will then be offered food (called prasadam) and worshipped with sacred song.

Constance A. Jones

See also Gaura Purnima; Janmashtami.

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Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is primarily a north Indian festival carried out on the full moon of the month of Shravana, hence it is also known as Shravana Purnima. It is one of several occasions in which family ties are affirmed ritually, in this case, the bonds of affection and duty that tie together brothers and their sisters. On the day of the Raksha festival, the ritualized activity is initiated by a female sibling who will tie a Rakhi, a woven bracelet, on the wrist of her brother. The bracelet has traditionally been multicolored and with a protective amulet integrated into it. More recently, a wrist watch has become a more-than-acceptable alternative.

After the wristband is put in place, the brother and sister engage in prayer for the well-being of the other. The woman will then perform “aarti,” a ritual in which light from wicks soaked in ghee or camphor is offered to a favorite deity, and apply tilak (a mark made with kumkum powder) on the forehead of her brother. In return, brothers pledge to take care of his sister under all circumstances. Traditionally, men will present their sister with a gift as a sign of the pledge.

This ritual is done in the presence of the whole family, which has begun preparation for the key ritual early in the morning. Integral to the event are sweets that have been prepared for everyone’s consumption. The activity is also accompanied by a ritual wishing the major participants a long life. The most serious part of the ritual is the vocalizing of the responsibility of the male children of the family to protect the females.

In recent years, women without siblings have brought cousins and more distant relatives and male friends of the family into the family circle for Raksha Bandhan and to have a male to present the Raski bracelet.

The authority for the Raksha Bandhan ritual is derived from many stories of males coming to the rescue of females in the ancient Indian sacred books. One popular story concerns Lord Krishna, the incarnation of the god Vishnu, who

developed a relationship with the five Pandava brothers, all of whom were married to one woman, Draupathi. At one point, Krishna was hurt during a battle. Draupathi tore a strip of cloth from her sari, which was used to stop the bleeding. Krishna saw her concern for him in terms of sisterly love, and in return acknowledged that he was now bound to her as a brother.

Many years later, the Pandavas lost their wife in a game of dice. The winners began to remove her sari. Krishna used his divine powers to protect her virtue by elongating her sari to the extent that it could never be removed.

Another story concerns the demon king Mahabali, a great devotee of the god Vishnu. In response to Mahabali's devotion, Vishnu devoted time to protecting his kingdom and, in the process, being absent from his usual haunts and his wife, the goddess Lakshmi. Lakshmi disguised herself as a brahmin woman and went to Mirabali to discuss the situation with him. In the process, on Raksha Bandran, she placed a Rakhi bracelet on King Mahabali's wrist. She then revealed her true identity. The king was moved by her presentation and immediately requested Lord Vishnu to return to his family and home. From this story, Raksha Bandran is sometimes referred to as Baleva, a reference to Mahabali's devotion to Vishnu.

Constance A. Jones

See also Chaitra Purnima; Guru Purnima; Kartika Purnima; Magha Purnima; Narieli Purnima; Sharad Purnima.

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Ramadan

According to numerous accounts of the Prophet Muhammad, fasting was a regular part of his practice, and he admonished his followers to follow his example as they were able. For him, a normal routine was to fast during the daylight hours and pray during the evening (his prayer time taking from his sleeping hours). For followers, these days of fasting through the years were seen as supererogatory acts, above and beyond the basic requirements of the faith. The fasting done by Muhammad, though not required of the faithful, set the pattern to be followed in the required month of fasting known as Ramadan.

One of the five pillars of Islam, Ramadan is an annual fast named for the ninth month of the Islamic calendar when it occurs. As the Islamic calendar is a strictly lunar calendar, Ramadan occurs at a different point in the Common Era calendar each year. Ramadan recalls the beginning of Muhammad's writing down the Qur'an. It is a requirement of all, and those who because of illness cannot fast, are required to make up the days once they again attain their health.

Fasting begins at daybreak, defined as the moment one can discern the first streak of dawn against the black horizon (usually an hour and a half before sunrise). The fast continues until sunset. The day of fasting begins with a predawn meal (*sahur*) and ends with a light fast-breaking meal (*iftar*) which is followed by a time of prayer. People may gather at the mosque at the end of the day to share the *iftar* and hold communal prayers (*tarawih*). Muhammad advised people to break the fast each day quickly, thus it became common to prepare food ahead of time and have it ready as soon as the sun descended beyond the horizon.

The practice of fasting is seen as one of the ways, if not the best way, to please God, though it is meant as a means of teaching self-discipline not only about food and the body, but about life in general and relationships with others. Thus, during the fast, one takes pains not to use questionable language or show anger, and one responds to any screaming or shouting with the simple observation that they are fasting. Those who have taken up bad habits (such as the consumption of tobacco or alcohol) have Ramadan as a time to drop such practices.

Ramadan is also a time for additional prayer, the reading of the Qur'an, and the showing of generosity. Muslims are also required to pay a percentage of their income for the care of the poor (another pillar of the faith), and Ramadan is often chosen as the time to fulfill that obligation.

While Ramadan as a whole is considered a remembrance of the giving of the Qur'an, one night in particular, called Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power, is commemorated as the anniversary of the actual day that the Qur'an first began to be revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.

The Night of Power is usually observed on the 27th day of Ramadan, but it also carries with a certain element of mystery. It is a night marked by the descent of angels from the heavens to the earthly realm. For those engaged in prayer, it is a time to receive mercy and protection from every bad thing. Muhammad requested his followers to search for it and attempt to discern when it occurred, noting only that it was one night in the last 10 of the 30-day month, and that the time of receiving its benefits lasted until dawn. Appropriate actions for the night include prayer, self-examination, the asking of forgiveness for oneself and all Muslims, listening to sermons and engaging in discussion concerning the Night of Power, and remembering Allah.

Ramadan is immediately followed by Id al-Fitr, the Festival of Breaking the Fast, a feast day that marks the end of the fasting period. It is the 1st day of the 10th month in the Islamic calendar (months being marked from new moon to new moon). The day is a truly festive occasion, being seen as a sign of God's blessing following the time of testing and discipline, and is marked by donning fresh (and/or new) clothes, donating food to the poor ("Zakat al-Fitr"), and visiting family, friends, and neighbors. The day begins early in the morning with prayers in the local mosque.

In countries in which Islam is the predominant religion, the society is organized to accommodate Ramadan. Muslims living in other countries have imported the

practice and accommodate their lives so as to participate fully in the fast and other activities.

James A. Beverley

See also Baha'i Fast; Id al-Fitr; Islam—Annual Festivals and Holy Days; Jainism; Laylat al-Qadr.

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Ramakrishna, Birthday of Sri (February 18)

Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) was an Indian spiritual teacher who became widely known in the West when his students became central to the first generation of the spread of Hinduism in the West. He was born in a small town near Calcutta, West Bengal. Raised in a religious environment, as a young man he showed a tendency to experiences of spiritual reverie and even temporary loss of consciousness. With little interest in formal schooling or common practicalities, in 1866, he became a priest at a temple located on the Ganges River near Calcutta that was dedicated to the Goddess Kali (a popular deity in Bengal). He fervently meditated upon Kali, and eventually she appeared to him.

Ramakrishna's erratic behavior was ascribed to what was termed "spiritual madness" not unlike that experienced by the Bengali saint Sri Caitanya (1486–1534). He found several teachers who understood what was happening to him and mentored him. He began to emerge as a mystic. He also began to find himself encircled by a group of young disciples. He taught a Vedantist philosophy in which God is described in impersonal terms but juxtaposed his teachings with the practice of devotion to the Hindu deities. He also adopted practices and ideas from a spectrum of religions and found in his mysticism a unifying core, which led him to an understanding that all religions bring people to the same end.

Swami Vivekananda, his most famous student, attended the World Parliament of Religions meeting in Chicago in 1893, and emerged as one of the most popular speakers. He would later found the Vedanta Societies, a loose network of centers in North America, and upon his return to India, he founded the Ramakrishna Math (monastery). By this time, Ramakrishna had died of cancer of the throat. His wife Sarada Devi, much honored by Ramakrishna's disciples, assumed leadership responsibilities in the movement. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Society became a global network of centers, many established among the Indian diaspora.

Ramakrishna is remembered on his birthday by the Ramakrishna Math and mission and the Vedanta societies around the world. At many locations, there will be special programs to reflect upon his teachings and examples and the world that has derived from his life. Disciples are encouraged to read and study his writings, to take his sayings as their guiding principles, and engage in some of the charitable activities maintained by the movement. Possibly the largest celebration is held annually at the Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and mission, located along the Hooghly River (a branch of the Ganges) in West Bengal. Thousands will gather at the math for a full day of lectures, pujas, and other gatherings.

J. Gordon Melton



The teachings of Hindu spiritual leader Ramakrishna Paramahansa are largely responsible for the spread of Hinduism in the West. (Library of Congress)

See also Gaura Purnima; Sarada Devi, Birthday of; Vivekananda, Birthday of Swami.

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Ramana Maharshi, Birthday of (December)

Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) was an Indian spiritual teacher from south India. At the age of 16, he attained a state of self-realization in what was described as a swift and spontaneous act of self-inquiry and left him in a state of total abidance in “God,” which in Indian thought is often identified, as Maharshi did, with the

true “Self” He then left home to take up residence on the slopes of the Arunachala Mountain, a sacred place of pilgrimage in southern India. Arunchala is believed by many to be a manifestation of the god Shiva, and there Marharshi was to remain for the rest of his life. He lived what others saw as a pure life that included his never touching money, and wearing only a simple loin cloth.

His disciples understood his most important teachings were imparted in the midst of the silence that pervaded his presence. In that silence mature souls came to apprehend the peace of self-realization. When he spoke, he taught a path of self-inquiry and self-surrender. He asked those who approached him to inquire from where their “I-consciousness” originates, to return to that source, and to abide there. To inquire “Who am I?” is the path of self-knowledge with which he became identified. He also taught seekers to throw all the burdens of life upon the divine and to rest in perfect peace in the heart. Though he was obviously from a Hindu background, he never questioned the outward religious practices or beliefs of those who came to see him. Rather, he taught each person to seek his or her own source. He believed that there was only one source for all, the Supreme Self or God.

Once on Arunachala, Maharshi lived in a cave and maintained a discipline of silence. Very slowly, disciples gathered, buildings began to appear, and an ashram emerged. The central building was the simple meditation hall, in midst of which was a couch, upon which he sat in the daytime and slept at night. During teaching sessions, devotees sat before him on the floor. Following his death, he was buried at the ashram, which has continued as a spiritual center perpetuating the teaching and methods espoused by Maharshi.

The Ashram observed two major celebrations each year in commemoration of the birthday and mahasamadhi (death) of Maharshi. The Jayanti or birthday of Sri Maharshi is celebrated every year during the Indian month of Marga on the day on which the moon is in the constellation known as Punarvasu (late December or early January on the Common Era calendar) and close to the winter solstice. The Aradhana, or day of his passing, is celebrated on the 13th day of the dark half of the solar month of Chaitra, (April–May on the Common Era calendar). This date is relatively close to the spring equinox.

On both dates, devotees arrive at the ashram where elaborate pujas (worship) are led by the priests at Sri Maharshi’s shrine. Afterwards they will share a feast especially provided for them. Both Maharshi’s mother and brother (Sri Niranjanananda Swami) lived for many years and died at the ashram. Their mahasamadhi days are also observed, though on a small scale. The centers led by disciples of Maharshi, now found in many countries worldwide, observances of his birth and death dates are also held.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ramakrishna, Birthday of Sri; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Vivekananda, Birthday of Swami; Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa.

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Rama Navami

Rama Navami, or the appearance day of Lord Ramachandra, is a popular Indian holiday celebrated on the ninth day of the Hindu month of Chaitra, the first month of the year. As the New Year's Day celebration generally lasts for a week or more, Rama Navami is often seen as the close of the New Year's celebrations. As it concerns the incarnation of the deity Vishnu as Rama, it is especially celebrated by Vaishnava Hindus, including the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Rama, or Lord Ramachandra, is a primary character in the *Ramayana*, the ancient Hindu epic. According to the story, his father Dasharatha was the emperor of Ayodhya, an ancient city of India located in Uttar Pradesh. He had three wives—Kausalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi. Following instructions given to him, Dasharatha brought in a prominent sage to perform a ritual. The god Yagneshwara then appeared to the king and gave him a bowl of divine pudding with instructions to give this food to his wives. They ate the pudding, and within a very short time, all were pregnant. The eldest wife gave birth to Rama. Sumitra bore twin boys, Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Vishnu incarnated as Rama in order to slay the demon Ravana. As he grew to adulthood, he married his wife Sita Devi, and lived with her in the forest, where they were joined by his brother Lakshmana. Ravana kidnapped his wife, which became the occasion of Rama assisted by the monkey-headed deity Hanuman, killing the demon. Hanuman's devoted activity on behalf of Ramachandra led to his being seen as the epitome of Vaishnava devotion. Rama is said to have crossed the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh on his way to rescue Sita at the spot where the Bhadrachalam temple now stands.

Rama Navami is seen as a day to celebrate the marriage of Rama and



An altar is prepared in honor of the Hindu god Rama. Rama Navami is the celebration of Lord Rama's birthday. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

Sita Devi, and in both temples and private homes, devotees will reenact their wedding. Toward the end of the day, statues will be taken out into the streets and lively processions occur as crowds gather to celebrate the day. Hare Krishna devotees will also fast through the daylight hours. Rituals of Rama Navami also center on Surya, the sun god, who assisted Rama in defeating Ravana.

The Bhadrachalam Temple located on the northern side of the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh, India, is one of the more famous locations for the celebrations of Rama Navami. There is also a set of temples in Ayodhya, India, on sites hallowed by Rama's presence.

In southern India, the whole nine days from the beginning of the year are celebrated as Rama Navami. It is a time to retell and dramatize the stories of the *Ramayana*. Japa yoga (the repetition of mantras) calling upon Rama will be continuously heard through the day. Some will carry on a fast through the whole nine days, others just on the ninth day. Temples will organize teaching sessions for people each evening.

Constance A. Jones

See also Gaura Purnima.

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Ratha Yatra

The Ratha Yatra Festival is the main annual celebrative event at the Jagannath temple in Puri, a coastal city in the state of Orissa in eastern India. Lord Jagannath is an incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu. While the festival has its main center in Puri, it is celebrated by Vaishnava Hindus worldwide. It has been celebrated annually in the United States since the 1970s, the primary site being Venice Beach in Los Angeles, and sponsored by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Vaishnava Hindus believe that Lord Jagannath was responsible for the creation of the whole universe. Jagannath is closely associated with his sister Subhadra and his brother Balabhadra.

The Jagannath Temple was built by Raja (or King) Ananta Varman Chodaganga Dev in the 12th century CE, and subsequently maintained and expanded by successive Hindu rulers through the next four centuries. Then in 1558, the state of Orissa was conquered by Afghan Muslims who had previously conquered

neighboring Bengal. The Afghans suppressed worship at Puri through the rest of the century. They were finally driven out in 1592, the main statues were reinstalled in the sanctuary in the rear of the temple, and worship of Lord Jagannath resumed.

Worship is regularly conducted before the statues in the temple, the daily ritual beginning at 5:00 a.m. It consists of several meals (the presentation of food offerings, called *prasadam*), several dressings (costume changes) of the statues, and the later distribution of the *prasadam* to the people, with no care taken to observe caste lines in the distribution.

The major event each year is the annual Jagannath festival that occurs in mid-summer on the second day of the waxing moon of the Indian Hindu lunar month of Ashadha. Lord Jagannath and his two siblings are placed in three large carts and carried from the temple to their “summer temple,” the Gundicha Mandir, a little over a mile from the main Jagannath temple. The cart upon which Lord Jagannath rides is a massive wooden structure constructed from hundreds of logs cut from the sacred *phasi* trees, a forest of which is kept in cultivation just for this annual event. Two slightly smaller carts carry Subhadra and Balabhadra. Lord Jagannath’s cart requires 4,000 men to pull it, and once it is moving, it is extremely difficult to stop (this fact being the origin of the popular war term *juggernaut*). Devotees in the tens of thousands gather to watch Lord Jagannath take the short trip. He will stay in the summer temple only seven days, after which they are returned to the main temple.

The Jagannath festival, though held in smaller versions in several other Indian cities, was largely unknown in the West until the advent of ISKCON, the Hare Krishna movement, in the United States in the 1960s. Very soon after organizing, ISKCON began to hold Jagannath festivals in different American cities, and their annual reenactment of the trip to the summer temple has become a popular attraction. It is currently held each summer in the major cities throughout the West where the movement has established temples.

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See also Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord; Gaura Purnima; Janmashtami.

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Reformation Sunday (October)

Reformation Day is a celebration of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Of all of the dates suggested for the beginning of the Reformation and the

emergence of the resulting Protestant Christian movement, none has gained the acceptance as the dramatic act of Martin Luther (1483–1546) in nailing his “95 Theses” (points of debate concerning contemporary Roman Catholic practice) on the door of the main church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. Although the actual date for the observance of Reformation Day is October 31, most churches actually celebrate it on the last Sunday in October. October 31 competes with the growing popularity of Halloween (especially in North America) and All Saint’s Eve.

The 95 Theses laid out in some detail Luther’s criticism of the practice of selling indulgences for the remission of the punishment of sins in purgatory and the theological affirmations that undergirded indulgences. The debate on this issue would lead Luther to question the authority of the pope as opposed to that of the biblical text, and the role of the church as the sole interpreter of the meaning of the text and the author of ideas that went beyond the text. Eventually, Luther and the Protestants would come to believe in the primal authority of the Bible and to champion the ability of the average believer to read and understand its meaning.

Every 50 or 100 years, large celebrations of the beginning of the reformation will be organized, but annually, most Protestant churches will recognize the anniversary of the Protestant movement on the last Sunday in October with sermons dedicated to the theme and the singing of Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” frequently referred to as the “Battle Hymn of the Reformation.” It is a public holiday in Slovenia and Chile and several of the German states

With the transformation of the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism in the post–Vatican II era, emphasis on the Reformation and celebrating the separateness of Protestantism has waned considerably. Many Protestant churches have marginalized the celebration of Reformation Sunday (which has traditionally been used to emphasize protestant differences with Roman Catholicism) while many of the newer denominations have distanced themselves from the history of the movement that gave them birth. At the same time, Roman Catholics have gained a new appreciation for Luther and have added “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” to their hymnals. Conservative Protestants have used the day to emphasize their differences with the more theologically liberal and ecumenically minded Protestants, often claiming that they have given away their heritage.

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See also Aldersgate Day; Bartholomew’s Day, Saint; Martinmas; World Communion Sunday; World Day of Prayer.

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Religious Freedom Day

Religious Freedom Day is a national observance in the United States that was initially proclaimed by President George Bush in 1993. It is celebrated on January 16, the anniversary of the 1786 passage of the Statue on Religious Freedom by the Commonwealth of Virginia, one of the building blocks of American emphasis on religious liberty. The Virginia legislation led directly to the First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution that guarantees that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Each year since 1993, the president has issued a new proclamation concerning the day.

The First Amendment of the Constitution has been an active force in the United States. Increasingly so, as the country moved in the 19th century as a land in which Christianity had a virtual monopoly on the religious life of the nation, though only a small percentage of the public were church members, into one that at the beginning of the 21st century that shows Christianity holds the allegiance of a clear majority of the American public (though the Christian community is divided into a number of denominations) but also finds a strong minority presence by groups of the Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Western Esoteric traditions. There is also a vocal atheistic community. As the pluralistic nature of the American religious community has become evident, the courts have regularly been asked to rule on a variety of issues relative to religious freedoms. In doing so, the courts are often asked to judge questions as to whether the specific issue before it relates to free exercise or the limitations of government in favoring one religion over another. Smaller groups tend to raise questions involving their ability to exercise their freedoms, while larger groups tend to be involved in questions of expressions of religion in government-supported institutions—schools, government offices, the armed services, and legislatures. Religious Freedom Day appears to have been prompted by a 1992 ruling by the Supreme Court that declared unconstitutional the offering of nonsectarian prayers at public school graduation ceremonies, suggesting that they tended to support the government establishment of religion.

Religious Freedom Day does not speak to the issues so much as it emphasizes the importance of the freedom to American life and calls upon the citizenry to reflect on its importance. This calls attention to the fact that religious freedom was the first item mentioned in the Bill of Rights, added to the Constitution to protect a spectrum of freedoms in the different states. In protecting the freedoms, the government chose to limit its own power.

There are no specifics mandated for celebrating the day, but in 2005, for example, President George W. Bush called upon the citizens to “observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of

worship.” Schools, often a focus of religious freedom issues, have been especially called upon to organize events emphasizing the civil rights issues around religious freedom. The U.S. Department of Education has issued a set of guidelines summarizing the religious liberties of students in the public school system.

A coalition of organizations representing a spectrum of approaches to religious freedom has joined to promote Religious Freedom Day. They include the Association of American Educators, the Beckett Fund, the Council for America’s First Freedom, Gateways to Better Education, the Institute on Religion and Democracy, and the Providence Forum.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Human Rights Day; International Religious Freedom Day; World Religion Day.

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Riḍván, Festival of (April 20–May 2)

The Festival of Riḍván is a 12-day festival. The 1st, 9th, and 12th days of Riḍván are three of the nine Bahá’í holy days on which work is to be suspended. Among the Bahá’í holy days, the Festival of Riḍván (“Paradise”) is preeminent, for it marks the inception of the Bahá’í Faith as a distinct religion. Observed from sunset on April 20 (marking the onset of April 21 in the Bahá’í calendar) to sunset on May 2, the Festival of Paradise comprises three Holy Days. On the 1st (April 21), 9th (April 29), and 12th (May 2) days of Riḍván, Bahá’í communities will gather to commemorate the signal events of that historic occasion.

The Bahá’í Faith, one of the youngest world religions, was founded by Mírzá ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí (1817–1892), a Persian nobleman known by his spiritual title, Bahá’u’lláh (“Glory/Splendor of God”). The Bahá’í religion is also regarded as having been cofounded by Bahá’u’lláh’s predecessor and harbinger, Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), known as the Báb (“the Gate”).

The unfolding of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic mission was gradual, progressively revealed in a series of disclosures. The “Festival of Paradise” commemorates Bahá’u’lláh’s private disclosure of his eschatological identity to a handful of his companions—around four years prior to his public proclamation to the rulers and religious leaders of the world (c. 1867–1873). To a select few Bábís, Bahá’u’lláh announced that he was the “Promised One” foretold by the Báb. To a select group of the world’s most powerful potentates and clerics, Bahá’u’lláh sent open epistles, proclaiming himself to be the “Promised One” foretold by the prophets of all past religions. In these “Tablets” (as the epistles were called), together with general Tablets addressed to kings and ecclesiastics collectively, Bahá’u’lláh stated that he was,

inter alia, the long-awaited “World Reformer” who came to unify the world—a transformation that would, in the course of time, come about through the power of his universal principles and laws adapted to the needs of this day and age.

Briefly, the history of Riḍván began on the afternoon of April 21, 1863 (around 3:00 p.m.). Bahá’u’lláh arrived in the Najíbíyyih Garden, subsequently designated as the “Garden of Riḍván.” Located on the east bank of the Tigris in Baghdad, Najíbíyyih was once a wooded garden, where Muḥammad-Najíb Páshá (Turkish: Mehmed Necib, d. May 1851), governor of Baghdad (r. 1842–1847), had built a palace and placed a wall around the garden. It is now the site of “Baghdad Medical City” (formerly known as Saddam Medical City), a large modern teaching hospital in Baghdad.

Bahá’u’lláh’s entrance into the Garden of Riḍván signaled the commencement of his momentous announcement, first to his companions, and eventually to the world at large. Exactly what transpired is shrouded in mystery, and accounts vary. Prior to this time, Bahá’u’lláh had concealed his mission for 10 years (1853–1863). This period of “messianic secrecy” has been referred to as the “Days of Concealment” (*ayyám-i-butun*—a term that connotes the image of embryonic development), although Bahá’u’lláh’s writings in Baghdad during this period are rife with hints about his prophetic mission, especially in his preeminent doctrinal text, the *Book of Certitude* (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*), which was revealed in two days and two nights in January 1861.

In 1869, as part of the subsequent public proclamation of his mission to the world’s political and religious leaders, Bahá’u’lláh dispatched his second epistle (c. 1869) to Napoleon III (d. 1873). In this “Tablet” (spirited out of Bahá’u’lláh’s prison cell by a Bahá’í pilgrim, who concealed the letter in the brim of his hat) to the emperor of France, Bahá’u’lláh announced: “All feasts have attained their consummation in the two Most Great Festivals, and in two other Festivals that fall on the twin days.” Here, the two “Most Great Festivals” are the Festival of Riḍván and the Declaration of the Báb (evening of May 22, 1844). The “twin days” refer to the Birth of the Báb (October 20, 1819) and the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh (November 12, 1817).

The purport of what Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed on that momentous first day of Riḍván, beyond the declaration that he was “He Whom God will make manifest,” involves matters of great import in that Bahá’u’lláh had decreed three of his most far-reaching laws, by (1) abrogating holy war, (2) asserting that no independent Messenger of God (literally, “Manifestation of God”) after Bahá’u’lláh would appear for at least a full 1,000 years, and (3) dispensing entirely with the Islamic category of ritual impurity or “uncleanness” (*najis*). Bahá’u’lláh later recounted this sweeping pronouncement in the Most Holy Book (the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*):

God hath, likewise, as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of “uncleanness,” whereby divers things and peoples have been held to be impure. He, of a certainty, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Riḍván, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our

most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 47)

The Festival of Riḍván is important for yet another reason: most Bahá'í elections take place at this time. On the first day of Riḍván (April 21), all local Bahá'í councils, each known as a Local Spiritual Assembly, is democratically elected, in a “spiritual election” conducted prayerfully and meditatively.

The system of Bahá'í elections is unique, both religiously and politically. Political scientist Arash Abizadeh has observed that Bahá'í elections are governed by formal institutional rules and informal norms that specifically prohibit such familiar features of the political landscape as nominations, competitive campaigns, voting coalitions, or parties. As an alternative model of democratic elections, Bahá'í elections incorporate three core values at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels: (1) the inherent dignity of each person; (2) the unity and solidarity of persons collectively; and (3) the intrinsic justice, fairness, and transparency of elected Bahá'í institutions. Bahá'í elections thus serve four primary functions: (1) selection (electing representatives); (2) legitimation (authorizing Bahá'í governing bodies in the eyes of the community at large); (3) education (cultivating the spirit of responsibility in each Bahá'í voter); and (4) integration (fostering solidarity within the community as a whole).

National Bahá'í conventions are also held during the Festival of Riḍván for the purpose of electing national councils, each of which is called a National Spiritual Assembly. An exception to the timing of these conventions occurs once every five years, when the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, is elected during the Festival of Riḍván. The next is scheduled for Riḍván 2013, with national Bahá'í elections rescheduled for May.

The Festival of Riḍván marks the inchoative establishment of the Bahá'í religion as a distinct faith-community through Bahá'u'lláh's disclosure of his divine authority. The Festival of Riḍván also marks the progressive advancement of the Bahá'í Faith as a distinct administrative order through the process of electing the faith-community's governing authorities.

Bahá'ís believe that in a future Golden Age—in which a self-governing world commonwealth emerges as the fruit of social evolution enlightened by Bahá'í sociomoral principles—the Festival of Riḍván is destined to become the greatest celebratory event in the world, according to the teleological Bahá'í vision of the inevitable course of human history.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; World Religion Day.

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Rishi Panchami

Rishi Panchami is a Hindu holiday with two related emphases. It is observed on the fifth day after the new moon in the Hindu month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar), which is the final day of the primary Teej Festival, known as Hartalika Teej, widely celebrated across northern India and Nepal as a women's festival. It is also a day set aside to show respect of the seven legendary sages known as the Sapta Rishis.

The celebration of Teej is directed to Parvati, the wife of Shiva. She is said to have fasted and practiced various austere practices to win Shiva's affections. Women observe a strict fast dedicated to Shiva on the day of Rishi Panchami. In some regions, the fast is also observed by men. Women begin the day with a special ritual bath and will later in the day visit temples dedicated to Shiva for an appropriate ritual. The fast is usually broken following the Rishi Panchami puja (worship).



Hindu women take turns pouring water on each other while taking a ritual bath in the Bagmati River during Rishi Panchami in Nepal. (Getty Images)

Throughout India, homage is also paid to the Sapta Rishis—Kashyapa, Atri, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra, Gauthama, Jamadagni and Vashishta. These men are considered the patriarchs of the Vedic religion, and are identified with the seven stars of the Big Dipper constellation. They work to assist every individual return to its divine origin.

The exact list of the seven and the specific tasks they undertake vary over time and among different segments of the Hindu community, although most agree that those sages mentioned in the ancient texts are deserving of honor.

Finally, in Gujarat, this day is also observed as Rushi Pancham.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Ambuvachi; Dattatreya Jayanti; Rushi Pancham; Teej Festivals.

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Rogation Days

Rogation Days, in the Roman Catholic Church’s calendar, are four days that were established for the holding of solemn processions designed to invoke God’s mercy. They took their name from the Latin *rogare*, meaning “to ask.” The activities make reference to the biblical admonition. “Ask, and you shall receive” (John 16:24).

The Major Rogation Day is April 25. This day is also set aside for the observation of the saint’s day for Saint Mark, but the two have no relation. Should Easter fall on April 25, the Rogation Day is moved to April 27. This day may have arisen to replace the old Roman festival, the Robigalia. The Rogation Day route used in Rome is the same as that for the earlier festival, and there is an obvious similarity of name. The April Rogation Day is quite early, having been inserted into the calendar soon after the Christian rise to power in the fourth century.

Several weeks after the Major Rogation Day, a set of three days are observed as the Minor or Lesser Rogation Days. Mamertus (d. c. 475). The archbishop of Vienne (Gaul), later canonized for his saintliness, introduced a set of litanies to be used during the week prior to Ascension that called for God’s intercession to prevent earthquakes and other natural disasters. These litanies evolved into the Lesser Rogation Days. They are observed on the three days immediately before Ascension Day (the 40th day after Easter, thus always a Thursday).

Rogation Days were observed as a time of fasting, to call attention to the Ascension, a feast day. Farmers would ask the priest to bless their crops. The entirety of Europe was laid out in parishes, one church to a parish. Rogation Days would be a time to process around the boundaries of the parish (called “beating the bounds”) during which time the priest would lead in prayers for the general protection and prosperity of the parish during the coming year. Incidentally, the Lesser Rogation

Days introduced a period of weeks (until Trinity Sunday) in which the priest would not perform marriages, an added incentive for scheduling marriages in June.

The wholesale revision of the liturgical calendar by Roman Catholics in 1969 included the elimination of the Rogation Days from an increasingly full calendar. Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) reintroduced Rogation Days as permitted observations, but did not mandate their return. Rogation Days also survived in the Church of England, and are still observed on occasion.

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See also Ember Days.

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Romeria of La Virgen de Valme (October)

Among the largest annual religious festivals in Spain, the Romeria (pilgrimage) to the town of Dos Hermanas attracts thousands to the town of Los Hermanos, now a suburb of Seville. The celebration dates to the time of the Castilian king Hernando III (1199–1252) who had become king in 1217. Much of Ferdinand's time on the throne was dedicated to reasserting control over the lands to the south that had been occupied by the Muslims since the eighth century. He successfully overran the cities of Úbeda (1233), Córdoba (1236), Jaén (1246), and Seville (1248). He thus united all of Andalusia with the one exception of Granada, from which he received tribute.

When he came to the conquest of Seville, he attributed the inspiration to extend his territory to the motivation and support supplied by the Blessed Virgin in the form of the statue of Our Lady of Valme. Valme is short for *valedme*, Spanish for "be of value to me." According to the story, King Ferdinand had carried a likeness of the Virgin, only seven centimeters in height and carved from wood, with him during the battle and subsequently had sworn an oath to her. After the battle, he transformed the mosque of Seville into a cathedral dedicated to the Virgin, and placed the statue on the hill overlooking Los Hermanos. A shrine was erected to house the statue, which became a subject of local devotion. Ferdinand was buried in the cathedral of Seville before an image of the Virgin, dressed in the attire of a lay Franciscan. He was later canonized as a saint.

Devotion to the Virgen of Valme reached a low point in the 18th century, and the shrine fell into disrepair. It was restored in the 19th century by order of the king of

Spain. The modern Romeria dates from the restoration. In 1894, its administration was placed in the hands of the Brotherhood of Nuestra Señora de Valme.

The annual Romeria is held on the third Sunday in October. A procession begins at eight in the morning at the church of Mary Magdalene in Dos Hermanas (a short distance from Seville) and heads to the Virgin's shrine, Hermitage of the Virgen de Valme. The Virgin leads the parade on a highly decorated cart pulled by oxen, followed by additional floats and numerous people on horseback and on foot. Once at the Hermitage, a Mass is said, and in early evening, the Virgin is returned back to the church of Mary Magdalene. The procession proceeds through the community in the midst of festive atmosphere of music dedicated to the Virgin.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Pilgrimage of the Dew.

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Rosary, Feast of Our Lady of the (October 7)

The initial phase of establishing and spreading the use of the rosary, a string of beads used to keep count of a prayer that is repeated multiple times, within the Roman Catholic Church is attributed to Saint Dominic (c. 1170–1221) and the first generation of Dominicans. At the more important turning points in the rosary's history, Dominicans were present to promote its cause. A new phase of popularizing its use, for example, began with the efforts of Alain de la Roche (1428–1475), a Dominican who founded the Rosary Confraternity (1470). Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521) gave his official commendation to the rosary in 1520, just as the Protestant Reformation began and as the expanding Ottoman Empire was threatening Europe from the east. Among the critical events of the 16th century was the battle of Lepanto (1571), at which the large Ottoman fleet was destroyed and the Ottoman approach through the Mediterranean stopped. Within weeks, Pope Pius V (r. 1566–1572), who also was a Dominican and who attributed the victory to the Virgin, instituted a new feast to Mary as "Our Lady of Victory" to celebrate the battle. Two years later, Pius's successor, Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585) renamed the feast-day as the "Feast of the Holy Rosary."

In 1716, Ottoman forces again suffered a great defeat following their unsuccessful attempt to take the Greek island of Corfu. Immediately after the battle, Pope Clement XI (r. 1700–1721) extended the feast of the Holy Rosary to the entire church. It was placed on the calendar for the first Sunday of October. There it remained until the 20th century. In 1913, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) slightly revised the date of

the feast, setting it annually on October 7. Then in 1969, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963-1978) again changed the name to the "Feast to Our Lady of the Rosary."

In addition to her role within the whole of Catholicism, Our Lady of the Rosary is the patron saint of several countries, Guatemala being notable among them. Here, Our Lady of the Rosary has a slightly different reference. In 1592, Friar Lopez de Montoya, a Dominican priest, commissioned a silver statue of the Virgin that would, early in the 19th century, eventually be installed in a Dominican parish church. In 1821, when Guatemalans were fighting for independence from Spain, the revolution's leadership met before the statue and proclaimed the Virgin to be the patroness of the new emerging nation, and pledged that they would not stop until independence was attained.

Subsequently, the Virgin of the Rosary was solemnly declared "Queen of Guatemala" (1833) and in an outdoor ceremony held in front of a large crowd, on January 26, 1934, was formally crowned. The crown includes some 120 emeralds and 44 diamonds among its many jewels. Today, the entire month of October, the month dedicated to the rosary within the Roman Catholic Church, has become a time of religious celebration and activity, including a variety of pilgrimages to the statue of the Virgin.

In 1917, during the apparitions at Fatima, Portugal, the Virgin specifically identified herself as Our Lady of the Rosary.

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See also Fatima, Feast of Our Lady of; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Lourdes, Feast Day of our Lady of; Most Holy Name of Mary, Feast of the; Queenship of Mary, Feast of.

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Rose Monday. See Mardi Gras

Rose of Lima, Saint's Day of St. (August 23)

Saint Rose of Lima (1586–1617), canonized in 1671, was the first person in the Americas recognized as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. She was born Isabel Flores y Oliva in Lima, Peru, on April 20, 1586. Her parents were from Spain.

Reportedly, she developed an early tendency to a life of devotion and piety, which set her at odds with her parents, who looked for a favorable marriage for her. She had, however, read of Saint Catherine of Siena, whom she adopted as a role model. Through her teen years, she became known for her veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus, to which she added fasting thrice weekly and engaging in secret penances.

Isabel took the name Rose at her confirmation. At one point, accused of being vain, she cut her hair and adopted plain clothing. Family opposition simply increased once she announced her decision to live a celibate life. Increasingly, her life revolved around a small grotto that she and her brother had built. The devotion manifest through her teen years led to her becoming a Dominican nun at the age of 20. The new context provided a more welcoming environment for her increased penances, including the wearing of a spiked crown, which she covered from view with roses. She had a variety of mystical encounters with Christ, during which she offered her austerities for the idolatry she perceived to abound in Peru. She also set up a room in her home as a haven for homeless children, the elderly, and the sick.

In the decade following her relatively brief earthly life (she died at age 31), miracles were increasingly attributed to her, thus justifying her beatification by Pope Clement IX (r. 1667–1669) shortly after assuming his office. She is known today as a patroness of the Philippines, Peru, South America, all of Latin America, and of the Western Hemisphere.

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See also Martin de Porres, Saint's Day of St.; Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint's Day of St.

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Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is often referred to as the Jewish New Year, though it is observed on the first day of the month of Tishri, which is the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar. It occurs at some point between September 5 and October 5 on the Common Era calendar. It starts the civil year in the Hebrew calendar, and is considered the New Year for people, animals, and legal contracts. Rosh Hashanah may be adjusted a day as it cannot fall on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday.

Tradition acknowledges Rosh Hashanah as the point from which new calendar years as well as the sabbatical (*shmita*) and jubilee (*yovel*) years are designated. The dating of Rosh Hashanah was traditionally done by observing the moon, which marked the move from one month to the next. Due to the difficulty in observing the moon in some years, and to getting the word out to the areas farthest from Jerusalem, it became common to celebrate Rosh Hashanah for two days, a practice continued in today's Orthodox and Conservative Jewish communities. The two-day Rosh Hashanah is an official holiday in Israel.

The observance derives from the Torah (the Five Books of Moses in which the Jewish law is laid down), and specifically from Leviticus 23: 23–25, which reads, “And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation. Ye shall do no manner of servile work; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD.” From this verse comes the practice of the blowing of the *shofar*, a trumpet made from a ram's horn. Its sounding is meant to awaken those within its reach from their soulful slumber. Rosh Hashanah is among the days of rest; hence, many of the prohibitions on activity of the Sabbath are in effect.

The Talmud speculates that Creation began on what would be the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Elul. Six days later, the first day of Tishri, humans were created. Thus Rosh Hashanah, among other things, commemorates the creation of the human race.

Ritually speaking, Rosh Hashanah serves the important function of initiating the High Holidays, the high point in the annual calendar of Jewish observance. The first 10 days of Tishri are a time for self-reflection, confession, and repentance, all leading to the last day, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The elements for the observance of Rosh Hashanah were spelled out in the Oral Law, which were subsequently written down in the *Mishnah*, a late second-century attempt to commit the Oral Law to written form so it would not be lost in tumultuous times, and which became one of the two main parts of the great body of Jewish law, the Talmud.

On the day of the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the last day of the month of Elul, known as *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, Jews seek to end vows they have made that have not been fulfilled. If one has made a vow to do something, the individual (a male) may gather a small group of cohorts and ask them to nullify the vow. The individual then joins in nullifying the vows of the others. This action is seen as part of starting the New Year with a blank slate.

On Rosh Hashanah, Jews worship together in the synagogue, using a special liturgy that includes Scriptural readings, like on the Sabbath, and that emphasizes God's sovereignty. Worshippers greet each other with good wishes for the coming year. In their homes, they eat festive meals, which typically include apples and honey to symbolize hopes for a sweet year, and many homes display the New Year's cards that modern Jews have come to send to one another. Later in the day, some will walk to a nearby stream and throw in the contents of their pockets, symbolically



Orthodox Jewish men pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City in observance of Rosh Hashanah. (Andrea Basile/Dreamstime.com)

casting off the sins of the old year. This ritual, called Tashlikh, points out one of the differences with the Sabbath. For Tashlikh, people carry small pieces of bread in their pockets to cast into the flowing waters. If Rosh Hashanah falls on a Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday, Tashlikh is observed on the afternoon of that day. If, however, it falls on Saturday (the Sabbath), then Tashlikh is observed on the following Sunday afternoon, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, to avoid the prohibition against carrying on the Sabbath, which is considered work.

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See also Days of Awe; New Year's Day; Yom Kippur.

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Rukmini Ashtami

Rukmini Ashtami is the birthday of Rukmini, the wife of Krishna. Though Krishna is most often pictured with his consort Radha, one of the gopis who herded cattle in Vrindavan in his youth, he would later marry Rukmini, the daughter of King Bhismaka. The king wanted Rukmini to marry Krishna, but their union was opposed by Rukmini's brother. To avoid a family division, Krishna kidnapped her and took her to Dwarka, Gujarat, where he then lived, and they were married. She ruled as his queen and bore him a son, Pradyumna.

Today, Vaishnava Hindus worship Rukmini as an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi. Her birthday is primarily celebrated by women, who venerate her, her husband, and her son. It is a day of fasting. Married women see that honoring Rukmini is a way to ensure conjugal happiness, and they also entreat her assistance in finding a proper spouse for their unwed daughters.

Rukmini Ashtami is observed on the eighth day of the waning moon in the Hindu lunar month of Pausha (December–January on the Common Era calendar). Rukmini is rarely presented in a temple by herself, but always standing beside her husband Krishna. Rukmini Ashtami will be acknowledged with special pujas and rituals in all of the temples dedicated to Lord Krishna, especially those in those parts of India especially associated with him such as Mathura and Vrindavan.

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See also Janmasthami.

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Rushi Pancham

Rushi Pancham is a unique celebration in the state of Gujarat in India observed by farmers and by women on the fifth day of the waxing moon in the Hindu month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar).

Relative to women, Rushi Pancham speaks to issues of ritual purity. As is true in other traditions, Hindu women should refrain from performing any religious ritual or visiting any temples during their menstrual cycle. In some more conservative rules, the beliefs relative to the menstrual period are much stricter. Should a woman do either, she may perform the Rushi Pancham ritual, which acts to absolve her of any guilt. This day coincides with the last day (called Rishi Panchami) of the women's celebration of the Teej Festival.

For Gujarati farmers, Rushi Pancham serves as a general panacea for any sins such as injuring an animal committed during the previous year. The ritual performed on this day is said to recompense for any sin committed in the past year.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Ambuvachi; Dattatreya Jayanti; Rishi Panchami; Teej Festivals.

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S

Sacred Heart of Jesus, Feast of the

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a popular form of Roman Catholic piety focused in an iconography that pictures Jesus with a body opened to reveal a heart encircled by a crown of thorns symbolic of his sufferings. Above the heart is a cross and flame. Devotion to the Sacred Heart emerged out of contemplation on the suffering of Jesus at his crucifixion. While on the cross, he was stabbed in the side with a spear, a wound that many came to believe must have penetrated his heart. During the Middle Ages, there was a shift in contemplation of the wound in Jesus's side toward a veneration of his heart. Content was added from all of the traditional compassionate attributes associated with the human heart, and drew added connotations from scriptural passages on God's love.

The symbolism of Jesus's loving heart found a new emphasis in the 17th century due to the efforts of Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690). Sister Margaret Mary had experienced apparitions of Jesus for many years prior to her joining the Visitation order in 1671. Then on December 27, 1673, she had another vision of Jesus in which he revealed the secrets heretofore hidden about his Sacred Heart. He also assigned her the task of spreading the message of the Sacred Heart. Her work was given further direction by two additional visions in 1674 and 1675. She began to write about what she had learned in the visions and her sister nuns assisted in the distribution of the message. Soon, all of the chapters of the Visitation order, especially in France, erected an altar to the sacred heart in their chapels.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart grew slowly in France through the 18th century. Doubts had been raised about Sister Margaret Mary and her visions, and it was not until 1765 that these were resolved and the Feast of the Sacred Heart was officially sanctioned throughout the country. In 1856, with the strong urging of the French bishops, the pope approved a feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was placed on the calendar for the whole Church.

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart on Montmartre in Paris, now one of the most recognizable landmarks in the city, emerged as the great center for the further promotion of the Sacred Heart. Its construction was an outgrowth of the supplication to the Sacred Heart for France made by the faithful during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871). Central to the main sanctuary is a mosaic of the Sacred Heart showing Jesus with His arms open wide. In 1899, Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) consecrated the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His successor, Pope Saint Pius X (r. 1903–1914) decreed that a renewal of that consecration be held

annually. Later, Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1929) issued an encyclical that affirmed his belief that Jesus has truly revealed his message to Sister Margaret Mary. Finally, in 1956, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the placement of the Feast of the Sacred Heart on the general church’s calendar, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) issued a lengthy letter with instructions of perpetuating worship of Jesus’s Sacred Heart.

The feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated on Friday, 19 days after Pentecost Sunday. Pius XII’s 1956 encyclical became the basis upon which an extension of the feast is performed in family homes. Called the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart, the ceremony aims at consecration of a family’s member to the Sacred Heart. As part of the ceremony, an image (a statue or a picture) of the Sacred Heart is then formally “enthroned” in the home as a constant reminder of the member’s consecration.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart received additional support from the parallel devotion to what is termed the Divine Mercy, a practice initiated by Sister Josefa Menendez (1890–1923), a young Spanish woman who had joined a French religious order.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Divine Mercy Sunday; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Feast of the; Most Precious Blood, Feast of the.

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Saga Dawa Düchen. See Wesak/Vesak

Sai Baba of Shirdi, Birthday of

Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), not to be confused with the contemporary Indian spiritual teacher called Sathya Sai Baba (b. 1926), was a Hindu saint, yogi, and guru who is believed by many to have been an incarnation of a deity, possibly Shiva or Dattatreya (a deity who embodied the three major Hindu deities of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva), and/or a Sadguru, a title for the most prominent teachers leading others to the enlightened state. He was honored even in his lifetime in India, and many miracles are ascribed to him. His name draws on both Hindu and Muslim words, and he spent much of his life trying to bring reconciliation to the often-hostile Indian Muslim and Hindu communities, hostilities

that would lead to Muslims setting up the nation of Pakistan. While primarily remembered as a saint among the Hindus, who have built a number of temples in his honor, he dressed as a Muslim, often quoted Muslim sources and used Muslim prayers, and engaged in practices identified with the Muslim community, such as eating meat and refraining from the use of alcohol.

Sai Baba's place and date of birth are unknown, an obstacle to those who wish to honor him. Many place his birthday as September 29, but without evidence to support that date. He emerged out of obscurity in his teen years when he settled at Shirdi, Maharashtra, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. He typically dressed and is generally pictured wearing a one-piece robe called a kafni and a cloth cap.

His fame was primarily local until the first decade of the 20th century, when his small band of disciples in Shirdi began to spread the story of their devotion to a modern saint and the miracles that were gathering around him to other parts of India. Pilgrims began to make their way to his town and the mosque in which he resided. Included among the visitors were a few who later became prominent teachers themselves, most notably Meher Baba.

Sai Baba was buried in a Hindu temple in Shirdi. As temples were dedicated to him, murtis (statues) of his likeness were set up for the convenience of disciples wishing to offer veneration. In some locations he sits beside murtis of his mother Easwaramma who has become an honored figure for bearing and raising the future saint. His fame continued to grow through the 20th century, and the contemporary Sathya Sai Baba claims to be his reincarnation.

Most Hindu disciples of Sai Baba of Shirdi celebrate his birthday on the holiday otherwise known as Guru Purnima, on the day of the full moon (purnima) in the Hindu lunar month of Ashadh (which occurs in June or July of the Common Era calendar). This day is set aside for all Hindus to show special veneration to their spiritual teacher, their guru. This date has seemed appropriate given the lack of knowledge of his actual birthday. Sathya Sai Baba, who also has a significant following in India and increasingly around the world, claims that the actual birth date is September 28, and that date is celebrated among his disciples. On his birthday, devotees will gather at the temples dedicated to him for worship (puja) and to share a meal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Guru Purnima.

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Saint John Lateran, Feast of the Dedication of (November 9)

The fame and hence importance of the Church of Saint John Lateran, more properly the Patriarchal Basilica of the Most Holy Savior and Saint John the Baptist at the Lateran, has been somewhat eclipsed by the role assumed by Saint Peter's Basilica, by far the most well-known Roman Catholic Church. However, officially, Saint John Lateran is the pope's cathedral or principal church of the Diocese of Rome and its bishop. After centuries as the leading church in Western Christendom (the Lateran Palace was, for example, the sight of five all-church councils between the 12th and 16th centuries), it gradually fell into relative obscurity as it was increasingly left to the care of a cardinal vicar named by the pope to administer the Diocese of Rome in his name so he could focus his attention on the global Church. The feast day recalls the church's former glory.

The Lateran Basilica emerges in the fourth century when it served as a palace belonging to Fausta, the wife of the emperor Constantine. After Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 313, he gave the palace to the Pope Miltiades (r. 311–314). It was dedicated to Christ as Savior by Pope Silvester I (r. 314–335) on November 9, 324. The first basilica was destroyed and rebuilt in the 10th century by Pope Sergius III (r. 904–911). At this time, a large baptistery in the rear of the church was added and named for John the Baptist. Pope Sergius then rededicated the church, adding John's name to it. Two centuries later, Pope Lucius II (r. 1144–1145) rededicated the basilica in the name of John the Evangelists. The popular designation as Saint John Lateran relates to it having both Johns as its patron saints.

The centrality of Saint John Lateran began its decline in the 14th century when papal headquarters moved to Avignon, France. In the pope's absence, maintenance at the Lateran basilica was neglected, and it was damaged by several earthquakes. When the popes returned, they tended to stay on the Vatican Hill rather than at the Lateran, located on the Coelian Hill. Then in the 16th century, the present Saint Peter's was erected, and attention was largely moved away from Saint John, though it continues to house the offices of the diocese of and thus functions as the “chancery” of the diocese.

Historically, Saint John Lateran was the sight of the 1929 signing of the Lateran Treaty, three agreements between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See that resolved a set of continuing issues that remained from the 19th-century unification of Italy and destruction of the former Papal States in central Italy.

One bit of continuing recognition given Saint John's Lateran, as the practice of holding Jubilee years in Rome emerged, the church was included as one of the four churches that were to be visited during the believer's pilgrimage to Rome. It is also the oldest of the four, and as such, lays some claim to being the mother church of Western Christendom.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chair of St. Peter, Feast of the; Jubilee Year.

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Saint John's Eve/Day. See Summer Solstice.

Saint Patrick's Day (March 17)

Saint Patrick's Day, although celebrated by many as simply a secular holiday to honor the Irish, is primarily a commemoration of a most renowned and popular Roman Catholic saint, the patron saint of Ireland, and also incidentally of Nigeria. He was born Maewyn Succat in what is now Scotland late in the fourth century (c. 390–c. 461). He grew up in a Christian home, but during his teen years was captured by pirates and sold as a slave in northern Ireland. He eventually escaped and, after a time in Gaul (modern France), made his way back to Scotland.

At some point after reestablishing himself in Scotland, possibly toward the end of the 420s, he had a visionary experience that included an admonition to return to Ireland and assist its people. His life begins to take on more detail once he arrived in what would be his new home early in the 430s. A charismatic apostle, he is remembered as a gentle man. He



Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and Nigeria. Using the shamrock to teach the holy trinity, he became the first bishop of Ireland. (Library of Congress)

would write two works, an autobiography, the *Confessio*, and his open *Letter to Coroticus*, in which he protested the continuing slave trade.

Though not a monk, Patrick operated out of a monastery he founded at Armaugh, later to become the site of his chair as the first bishop of Ireland. Accounts of the origination of Ireland as a Catholic country usually begin with Patrick, who also became the subject of numerous legendary stories. He is credited with ridding Ireland of snakes and of using the ubiquitous shamrocks as teaching tools—their three leaves becoming symbolic of the Christian Trinity. Biologists have suggested that, in fact, there were never any snakes in Ireland.

He died in 461, at Saul, the site of the first church built by Patrick. His feast day, March 17, is the day of his death. In the wake of the widespread movement around the world in the 19th century, and the role that many Irish came to have in the church, numerous churches and even cathedrals were named for Patrick, most notably the cathedrals in New York City, Chicago, Melbourne, and Auckland. In Ireland, Saint Patrick's cathedral in Dublin is considered the country's national church.

Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated with a special Mass at Catholic churches, especially those with a significant Irish membership, but has become better known as a day in which the Irish and their non-Irish friends dress in green and retire to the local pubs to see how much alcohol can be consumed. Chicago has become known for its attempts to pour green dye into the Chicago River.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St.; Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.

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Saint Stephen's Day (December 26)

Saint Stephen's Day (the feast of Saint Stephen's) calls attention to the role of martyrdom of Christians throughout Christian history who have died for their profession of faith by recalling the first Christian martyr. Stephen was stoned to death.

Stephen appeared in the church at Jerusalem during its growth phase after the day of Pentecost, when the church members chose him as one of the first seven deacons to assist the apostles in some of the practical matters of running the church. He came to be known as a man of great faith and power around whom numerous miracles were reported. Eventually, he was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God and

hauled before the council of Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin. In his speech to the council, Stephen accused the leaders of being stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart, and spoke as if he expected them to continue a history he recounted of each generation's killing of its prophets. He ended the speech as a visionary who was seeing the heavens open and himself as a servant of God also ascending on high.

The council reacted emotionally. They sent Stephen from the city where he was stoned (Acts 7:59). His clothes were given to a young Jewish intellectual named Saul who at the time also engaged in activity aimed at suppressing Christianity. Saul would later, following his conversion, become a Christian missionary and the primary subject of the New Testament book of Acts of the Apostles. His martyrdom was witnessed by a Jewish leader, the future Paul the Apostle, who was at the time engaged in activity designed to persecute the church.

Stephen was especially honored in the church during its years of its clandestine existence and repeated persecution prior to being legalized by the emperor Constantine (272–337 CE) in the fourth century. Historians in general see the death of Stephen as occasioning the church's moving from Jerusalem to Antioch and other locations throughout the Middle East.

Over the centuries, Saint Stephen was identified with the wren. The Irish, for example, had a legend that he was in hiding and was betrayed by the sounds of a bird chattering away. In Ireland, where it is celebrated as a national holiday, small boys would hunt a wren, and if caught, the wren was tied to the top of a decorated pole or holly bush. The day is also important in Wales and Catalonia, and Serbia has adopted Saint Stephen as their patron saint. Elsewhere, throughout the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy, Saint Stephen's Day is celebrated with a special Mass. The Orthodox Church celebrates the day on December 27.

Celebrated on December 26, Saint Stephen's Day often merges into Christmas celebrations, as occurs in John Mason Neale's lively carol, "Good King Wenceslas looked out/On the feast of Stephen," which includes the lines, "Joy that martyrs won their crown,/opened heaven's bright portal,/when they laid the mortal down/for the life immortal" (http://www.carols.org.uk/good_king_wenceslas.htm). Stephen was also designated the patron saint of horses. In central Europe on this day, farmers would decorate their horses and bring to the parish church for a blessing.

J. Gordon Melton

See also George, Feast Day of St.; Peter and Paul, Saint's Day of Sts.

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Saint Stephen's Day (Hungary) (August 20)

While most of Christendom celebrates December 26 as the feast of Saint Stephen, a reference to Stephen the first Christian martyr, Hungarians celebrate Saint Stephen's Day in August, but as a remembrance of another Stephen (c. 967–1038), the first Hungarian king (r. 1000–1038), who is recognized for his role in establishing Christianity in Hungary and the surrounding region. He is credited with organizing the Archdiocese of Esztergom, which had the effect of severing the dependence of the Hungarian church on the German archbishops. He ordered the building of numerous churches and funded the evangelization of the more rural areas of his kingdom.

After his death, his body was mummified. He was canonized in 1083. Some years later, his tomb was opened and his hand removed. Now known as "The Holy Right," it is venerated as a relic. Of the rest of the body, only some bone fragments have survived, and these now have been distributed to churches across Hungary. His life is celebrated by Hungarians on August 20, the day when his relics were formally moved to Budapest. In recent years, Hungarians celebrate Saint Stephen's Day with a procession and exhibition of the "Holy Right," which during the rest of the year is kept in Saint Stephen's Basilica, Budapest, a church completed in 1905.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the leader of Eastern Orthodoxy, recognized the canonization of Stephen in the year 2000. That same year, U.S. president Jimmy Carter ordered the return of the Holy Crown, believed to have been worn by King Stephen, returned to Hungary. The crown had been entrusted to the U.S. government in 1945 (at the end of World War II) and was subsequently placed in a vault at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

In 1687, the Roman Catholic Church moved the day for the veneration of Saint Stephen to September 2. Then in 1969, when the calendar of saints was significantly revised, September 16, the day after his death, became open, and it was moved. It is still celebrated on that day throughout the church outside of Hungary.

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See also Casimir, Saint's Day of St.; Saint Stephen's Day.

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Saints (Roman Catholic Tradition)

The word saint is derived from the Latin *sanctus* (Greek *hagios*), literally meaning holy. In Christianity, it refers to someone who has manifested a holiness of life or someone who has been martyred for the faith, and whom the church believes is now enjoying eternal life with God. In Roman Catholicism, holiness of life is spoken of in terms of “heroic virtue.” A saint is someone who has “heroically,” or to an exceptional degree, exhibited the supernatural virtues (since they are gifts of God’s grace) of faith, hope, and charity and the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

In its broader meaning, saint can be used to corporately designate all the faithful, both the living and the dead, particularly when describing the church as a “communion of saints.” The Second Vatican Council uses similar language in describing the church as a “holy nation” in its theology of sainthood (cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 50). In such a theology of holiness, the church recognizes that God alone is holy. God calls all persons to a life of holiness with a hope of sharing in eternal divine life. Holiness or sanctity is not something the church bestows on the individual, but is a gift given freely by God, which the church subsequently formally recognizes in the individual. All the faithful are called to a life of imitation of these saints, and through a special devotion, or veneration, of such saints can seek their intercessions through prayer, since saints enjoy a more perfect relationship, in heaven, with God. A distinction is drawn between the veneration of, or devotion to, saints and the worship which is due to God alone.

History

In the early church, the term saint was most commonly used to describe those who believed in Christ and who were called to follow him (1 Cor. 1:2; Romans 1:7). The Church preeminently recognizes the sanctity of the apostles of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. The term saint was also used describe those who were martyred for their faith during the persecutions of the first three centuries. The memory of these martyrs, their date of martyrdom, place of burial, and relics were venerated in this early period. The term saint was later also applied to monastics, who renounced the world and lived lives of asceticism and prayer; to early theologians, who defended and explicated the faith; and to those who were zealous in their preaching of the faith (like missionaries). Miracles were often attributed to such saints.

In its modern usage, canonization refers to the culmination of a process in which someone is declared a saint and is added to the canon, or list, of saints. However, in the early church period, the declaration of sainthood could be effected in a number of different ways, the most common being by popular acclamation by the people, or later, by the declaration of a bishop, pope, or synod (or council) of bishops. The synodal process has remained the normal avenue for canonization in the Eastern Orthodox churches. The Roman Catholic tradition gradually

developed a more formal process, beginning around the 13th century. Various revisions to the process of canonization followed, with the most recent protocols being announced in 1983. These recent changes were in part occasioned by the demands of modern historical and scientific inquiry.

Canonization in the Roman Catholic Tradition

In 1983, in the Apostolic Constitution, *The Divine Teacher and Model of Perfection*, Pope John Paul II established new procedures for canonization. There are two phases on the path toward canonization: the diocesan and the Roman. Normally, the process of initiating a case for the canonization of a person is done at a local level by a diocesan bishop, either Roman Catholic or Eastern Catholic, or by the bishop through a request of an individual or group of faithful. The local bishop appoints a postulator, who directs the investigation process at the local diocesan level. In the language of the constitution, those for whom canonization is sought are initially referred to as “venerable servants of God.” Local bishops are to inquire about the life of this person, their heroic virtues, orthodoxy or, in certain cases, their martyrdom. An examination is also done of any published or unpublished writings (such as diaries or letters), and any living witnesses are interviewed. The bishop is also to submit a declaration that no cult around the postulant has arisen. These reports and eyewitness accounts (the “acts”) are then gathered and submitted to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which then initiates the Roman phase of the investigation.

In the *New Laws for the Causes of Saints* (1983), the Congregation distinguished between ancient cases and recent cases, with the major difference being whether or not witnesses can give an oral deposition. Recent cases are normally not brought before the Congregation until at least five years after the death of the person, although the pope may unilaterally expedite this process by dispensing with the waiting period. For the latter case, the two most recent examples under consideration are Mother Theresa (1999, by Pope John Paul II), and Pope John Paul II (in 2005, by Pope Benedict XVI).

Within this Congregation exists a College of Relators, who are specifically entrusted with studying the cases for canonization, and preparing reports (or “positions”) of their findings and their reviews of the diocesan reports. This College of Relators can also draw upon consultants, that is, other experts in history, theology, and spirituality. A promoter of the faith oversees this process in its various phases.

Miracles

Miracles are seen as divine interventions by God, and thus by extension as confirmations of the sanctity of an individual. The revised constitution makes clear that an inquiry into alleged miracles is conducted separately from the examination of the life of holiness or martyrdom of a servant of God. The Sacred Congregation has a board of medical experts or physicians, who discuss cases of alleged miracles dealing with healing. These experts do not produce a theological judgment that a miracle has occurred, but are only asked whether or not there

exists a medical or scientific reason for a miracle or physical cure. No miracles are required for a martyr to be declared a saint.

During this process, relics (such as hair, bone fragments, or pieces of clothing) of the servant of God may be collected. The authenticity and preservation of relics is relegated to the Congregation. Relics are used in the church as a means of remembrance and devotion to a particular saint, and are especially kept in places of pilgrimage or as part of an altar.

At the culmination of the entire examination process, the Sacred Congregation, with its member bishops and cardinals, examines the final reports or votes of the relators, expert consultors, physicians and the promoter of the faith, and issues a report to the pope.

There are two distinct levels, the one preceding the other, of the formal recognition of the sanctity of an individual: beatification and canonization. Beatification requires the verification (or “instruction”) of one miracle attributed to the servant of God. If authentic, then the pope can declare the person as “Blessed,” wherein the church recognizes that this person is a model of heroic virtue. The person is given the title of Blessed, and a limited cult of veneration of this person is permitted at the local level, in a region or in a religious community. The process from beatification to canonization requires the authentication of a second miracle. Once a second report is submitted and a second miracle verified, the pope can proceed to a declaration of sainthood. This is a definitive declaration by the pope that the saint is enjoying eternal life in God and that a cult of veneration is to be extended to the universal church. Both beatification and canonization normally take place in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, during a Pontifical Mass, and are done solely through a decree of the pope. Those designated with the title Saint are assigned a particular feast day, which is commemorated by special prayers in the church’s liturgical calendar.

Jaroslav Skira

See also Saints, Celebrating the Lives of (Protestant Tradition); Saints, Veneration of (Roman Catholic Tradition).

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Saints, Celebrating the Lives of (Protestant Tradition)

By the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the veneration of saints had become a firmly established element in the piety expressed within the Roman Catholic Church, and the veneration of saints had been integrated into

the church's life from the use of relics and pilgrimages to the daily worship in which various saints were acknowledged and held up as exemplars for the faithful.

The new authority assigned to the Bible by Protestant leaders meant that the question of saints quickly became an issue, and the different role adopted for saints manifested a division of approaching the Reformation between Lutherans and Anglicans on the one hand and the Reformed and Presbyterians on the other. The Protestant attitude toward saints was initially affected by their rejection of the cult of relics. Protestants found the veneration and use of relics as unbiblical, while simultaneously calling the factual basis of some of the most prominent relics into question. Then, they rejected the veneration of saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, as detracting from the worship of God. The distinction between worship (due only to God) and veneration (offered to a saint) was at best vague, and on the practical level, they were almost indistinguishable. With the abandoning of any doctrine of purgatory, the afterlife place of punishment for final purification before entering heaven, the need of saints to assist souls in purgatory was also abandoned.

Lutherans and Anglicans tended to approach the Reformation from the principle of keeping everything of the medieval Western church that the Bible did not directly condemn. The Reformed church worked to keep only that which the Bible supported. The cult of saints seemed to fall in the middle ground, being neither condemned by the Bible nor advocated by it. The Bible certainly called people to a holy life and seemed to make a place for those who led by example. At the same time, Protestants emphasized God's role in sanctifying people by his grace, as opposed to the effort and pious activity of the individual in gaining saintly status.

Anglican and Lutherans, who most clearly affirmed their connections to the traditions of Western Christianity and who most clearly saw themselves as a reforming force and hence wished to keep alive their communications with Roman Catholics, found in the continued nurturing of the liturgical calendar and the acknowledgment of saints as helpful in that regard. Both revised the liturgical calendar, jettisoned some peculiarly Roman Catholic saints, and adapted it to their own needs. Both discarded the many dates associated specifically with the Virgin Mary, especially those developed primarily for extra biblical sources. Over time, they both added particularly Anglican and Lutheran saints to the observances.

Those churches in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition (as well as in what became the Mennonite tradition) tended to rid themselves of any acknowledgment of saints in the Roman Catholic sense of that term altogether. They found no biblical basis for the cult of saints. In looking at the biblical use of the term, they found that the New Testament tended to use it to refer to all church members. Paul addressed his letter to the saints or members of a particular church. They saw the saints as all who had been called by God to be a Christian, and who had as a result had their sins forgiven and their life sanctified by the action of God and his grace. One acted to become saintly not to attain sainthood, but out of gratitude

for God salvation. Thus, even the practice of citing particular people as saints was abandoned, much less the idea of venerating them in particular form. Biblical passages for developing a position on saints would begin with passages such as Ephesians 3:7–8 and Matthew 11:11, in which Paul and John the Baptist are cited as less than an average Christian.

Apart from those churches in the Lutheran and Anglican tradition, those churches that developed over the centuries within the Protestant world—Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Adventists, Pentecostals—simply never engaged in any discussion of the issue of saints. At best, they offered negative reflections on the idea of saints as part of a general anti-Catholic polemic that distinguished them from Roman Catholics. At best, they used the term in an informal manner to refer to people who exemplified the faith or was a hero missionary activity. In a similar manner, New Testament figures might be referred to as saints—particularly Paul and the gospel writers. United Methodists, for example, have frequently named churches after prominent church leaders, but also have a regulation limiting the designating of a person memorialized in the name of a church with the appellation “saint” to Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Paul.

Amid the new relations that have developed within the 20th-century Ecumenical Movement, those Protestants who had abandoned any discussion of saints have learned of the Lutheran and Anglican retention of a calendar of saints and have also gained a new appreciation of the role of saints in the Eastern Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox churches, some of whom became charter members of the World Council of churches and various national church councils. In the changing relationship between Protestants and Catholics in the post-Vatican II era, Protestants have found another motivation to reopen the issue of saints and especially of those saints named by the church prior to the split between the Eastern and Western churches.

The attempt to develop a new appreciation of saints was preceded by a new attention to the liturgical year, which spread among the Protestant churches of the Reformed, Presbyterian, and Methodist traditions. By the end of the 20th century, most of the larger denominations that participated in the World Council of Churches and its affiliated national and regional councils had adopted a liturgical calendar that included the major traditional feast days (Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Easter, and Pentecost) and seasons (Advent, Lent, Holy Week, Eastertide, etc.). This new emphasis on liturgical worship was championed among Methodists by the Order of Saint Luke (not to be confused with a similarly named group in the Episcopal Church that concentrates on spiritual healing).

The spread of the acknowledgment of the liturgical year set the stage for a new discussion of a calendar of saints. Again, the Anglicans and Lutherans led the way. In the 1970s, new editions of liturgical materials began to appear that expanded the calendar of saints to include people from a more broadly Protestant community. As expected, among Methodists, the Order of Saint Luke published a volume, *For All the Saints: A Calendar of Commemorations for United Methodists*, issued

in 1995, though this book has yet to receive any widespread circulation, much less implementation.

The development of an operative calendar of saints among Protestants is still in a preliminary stage, with many Anglican and Lutheran parishes ignoring any commemoration of saints. In anticipation of possible future interest in developing a calendar of saints as the larger Protestant churches grow more cooperative and familiar with each other and as they continue to dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, ecumenically oriented liturgists have proposed calendars of saints that include figures from the ancient and early medieval church, Protestant heroes and martyrs, and modern figures who exemplify more recent themes in social activism and ecumenical endeavors, all set within an acceptable Protestant theological context for the consideration of Christian exemplars. Among the more notable of such pioneering reconsiderations of saints is *A New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*, compiled by Philip H. Pfatteicher, an American Lutheran. A new openness to considering the idea of saints has been assisted greatly as a result of widespread circulation of information concerning 20th-century martyrs of Christianity, most from the mission fields in non-Western countries.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Saints (Roman Catholic Tradition); Saints, Veneration of (Roman Catholic Tradition).

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Saints, Veneration of (Roman Catholic Tradition)

The celebration and honoring of saints emerged out of the first three centuries of the church, when it existed as a somewhat clandestine organization within the Roman

Empire and was subject to periodic waves of severe persecution. It saw many of the founding apostles martyred, and over the succeeding decades, bishops, priests, and lay people distinguished themselves by their willingness to maintain their profession of faith through a range of torture and executions. The fourth century opened with one of the more memorable waves of persecution under the emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305 CE) that brought to the fore stories of numerous martyrs. The severe persecutions were followed by an amazing two decades during which time the church was successively decriminalized, officially tolerated, legalized, and then elevated to a privileged position as the favored religion by the emperor Constantine (r. 306–337).

The natural desire to honor the martyrs of the Diocletian persecution was significantly bolstered by the search for items of those associated with the founding events of the Christian movement by Constantine's mother Helena (c. 246–330). As the church expanded, it provided space for the acknowledgment of those who had lived exemplary lives and especially for those who had given their life for the cause of Christianity either by a lifetime of service or martyrdom, or both.

Through the centuries, the list of those who had for various reasons risen above the common norms of Christian living grew, attempts were made to understand the nature of the honor that were properly due to people designated as saints, and to provide some structure in which the veneration of the saints could be given. Within the Roman Catholic Church, efforts to perfect the practice of acknowledging the saints continue even as times change and the number of saints known to the church as a whole steadily grows.

The process of acknowledging an individual as a saint begins with a petition that nominated a person's saintly character to be examined, which may initiate a process of examination, which leads to two major steps when an individual is first beatified and then canonized. When canonized—that is, recognized by the church as a saint—the new saint is assigned a feast day, usually the day of their death, which is assumed to be the day of their rebirth in heaven. The new day may be venerated anywhere within the Catholic Church, but overwhelmingly, most saints are not known beyond the local area in which they lived and worked. In addition, a parish church may be built/named in their honor. The process of canonization is not seen as making anyone a saint, but as a process of recognition of a person's sainthood.

Items associated with a saint, first of all their body, and secondarily things they wore or used, came to be seen as bearers of their sanctity. A saint's relics were seen as inherently sacred and possessed of spiritual power. As Jesus was believed to have ascended bodily into heaven, there were no bodily remains; but there was the possibility of locating significant items associated with him, for example, the cloak he wore, the burial shroud in which his body was laid to rest following the crucifixion, and the wooden cross upon which he was crucified. In like measure, the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed to have been translated into heaven, and thus only items she had worn or used would be possible relics.

With the martyrs of the first three centuries, their bodily remains were the most valued items associated with them. Beginning with the apostles, the burial places

of martyrs would become sites at which shrines and later churches would be built. Churches in Rome were built over the burial sites of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and a church in northwest Spain came to house the body of what was believed to be the Apostle James. After the third century, the relics of martyrs would be transported to already-existing churches and there entombed. The relics of particularly famous martyrs could be divided among multiple locations. In the post-Constantinian church, the martyrs would be joined by the saintly confessors, that is, those who lived a faithful and holy life but died a natural death.

The church grew in large part due to the effort of saintly and holy people who existed as exemplars of the faith and were willing to give their life for their faith if required. These people were rightly honored by the church's membership as a whole. The emphasis given to the veneration of saints at times led to a level of subversion and corruption to enter, in that people desirous of relics to venerate were open to accepting fraudulent and questionable claims about objects presented as relics. Such questionable claims proliferated in the Middle Ages and became an issue at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

At the present time, the veneration of saints within the Roman Catholic Church is widespread; it is conducted within the context of a sophisticated theological structure that begins with distinguishing the veneration (*dulia*) that is proper to saints from the worship (*latria*) that is due only to the Holy Trinity. In between the two is the elevated veneration (*hyperdulia*) that is proper to the Blessed Virgin due to her special role in birthing Jesus and hence in the salvation of humanity. The respect and interaction with saints is distinct from worship, but should lead to the worship of God.

Veneration can include the honoring of saints through pilgrimages to sites identified with them and where their relics are enshrined. On the date assigned for their commemoration, they may be mentioned and/or otherwise acknowledged in the Mass said that day. There may be additional celebratory activities planned, including processions, musical performances, or efforts to educate the public about the saint. The saint's day is an opportune time for pilgrimages to their shrine or relics. On rare occasions, the relics of an especially prominent saint may be taken from their permanent resting place for viewing elsewhere.

Where relics are unavailable, a saint may be venerated through the use of an image—a picture, icon, or statue. Those saints popular enough to have their picture circulated also usually have prayers written for use in their veneration. Some saints have been especially identified with a particular form of devotion, and joining in that devotion is also a means of venerating the saint.

Saints are believed to be in heaven, in the presence of God, and thus immediately available to intercede with God on the behalf of the average believer. Seeking intercession with a saint for a particular need is one of the most popular forms of veneration. Many saints have been named patron saints of particular geographical areas (a country, a city, a district within a country), a particular occupation, or a particular need. People in a particular location or that follow an occupation or that

Calendar of Selected Saints

January 12/14	Sava, Saint's Day of St.
January 20	San Sebastian Day
January 21	Agnes, Feast Day of St.
February 1	Brigid of Kildare, Saint's Day of St.
February 3	Ansgar, Saint's Day of St.
February 6	Peter Baptist and Companions, Saint's Day of St.
March 6	Casimir, Saint's Day of St.
March 17	Saint Patrick's Day
March 19	Joseph, Saint's Day of St.
April 3	Benedict the African, Saint's Day of
April 11	Stanislaus, Saint's Day of St.
April 23	George, Feast Day of St.
	Adalbert of Prague, Saint's Day of St.
April 28	Peter Chanel, Saint's Day of St.
April 29	Catherine of Siena, Saint's Day of St.
May 4	Florian, Saint's Day of St.
May 27	Augustine of Canterbury, Saint's Day of St.
June 1	Boniface of Germany, Saint's Day of St.
June 9	Columba, Saint's Day of St.
June 10	Margaret of Scotland, Saint's Day of St.
June 13	Anthony of Padua, Saint's Day of St.
July 11	Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St.
July 23	Bridget, Saint's Day of St.
July 25	James the Greater, Feast Day of St.
July 26	Anne, Feast Day of St.
July 29	Olaf, Saint's Day of St.
August 1	Alphonse de Ligouri, Saint's Day of St.
August 8	Dominic, Saint's Day of St.
August 23	Rose of Lima, Saint's Day of St.
August 28	Augustine of Hippo, Saint's Day of St.
September 3	Gregory the Great, Saint's Day of St. (September 3)
September 8	Peter Claver, Saint's Day of St.
September 16	Cyprian, Saint's Day of St.
October 1	Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint's Day of St.
October 31	All Hallows Eve
November 1	All Saints Day
November 2	All Souls Day
November 7	Willibrord, Saint's Day of St.
November 11	Martinmas
November 30	Andrew, Saint's Day of St.
December 3	Francis Xavier, Saint's Day of St.
December 6	Nicholas, Saint's Day of St.
December 26	Saint Stephen's Day
December 27	John the Evangelist, Day of St.

have a particular need may immediately identify a saint who has already identified with their particular concern.

Over the years, Mary has appeared to many individuals and been identified with many locations and concerns, and as such, has come to be seen under many titles that offer more specialized introductions to what Roman Catholics believe to be

her larger role in human salvation. Those wishing to offer veneration to the Blessed Virgin may do so in any one of her varied images such as Our Lady of Lourdes (healing), Our Lady of Prompt Succor, or Our Lady of Japan, to name just a few.

During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Roman Catholic calendar of saints became quite clogged. The saints' commemoration also aligned in an ever-more-complicated ranking system, which interacted with the annual cycle of worship that followed the events in the life of Christ from Mary's pregnancy to his resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). In the 20th century, the system for laying out the liturgical year, including the days for acknowledging particular saints, was reformed on several occasions, most notably by Pope Pius X (1911), Pope Pius XII (1955), Pope John XXIII (1962), and Pope Paul VI (1969). In 1960, Pope John XXIII introduced a new simplified system of ranking all liturgical days, as first, second, third and fourth class days. In 1969, Pope Paul VI named the top three classes as "solemnities," "feasts," and "memorials," and divided memorial into obligatory and optional. Overwhelmingly, the commemoration of most saints would fall under the heading of optional memorials. The more important days celebrating the events in the life of the Virgin rank as solemnities, while those of the saints who appeared in the biblical record (the apostles, for example) are feasts. Some of the other more prominent saint's days are obligatory memorials.

On a day to which no obligatory celebration is assigned, the Mass may acknowledge any saint mentioned in the Roman martyrology for that day. All Saints Day, November 1, was set aside to honor all saints, all who have made it to heaven, who are unknown, otherwise unrecognized, and have no special feasts.

The Calendar of Selected Saints table in this entry provides a list of saint's days discussed elsewhere in this encyclopedia. Only a few of the more prominent saints could be selected for individual consideration. Those whose celebration had become international, includes activities in the public sphere, or who have been designated as patrons of a country were chosen for inclusion in this particular volume.

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See also Saints, Celebrating the Lives of (Protestant Tradition). Saints (Roman Catholic Tradition).

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Sakata Chauth. See Ganesh Chaturthi

Sakura Matsuri

Possibly the best known of all Japanese festivals, The Sakura Matsuri, or Cherry Blossom Festival, is held each spring as the cherry trees, indigenous to Japan, put out an effusive display of pink and white to the delight of all. The date of the Sakura festival varies each year relative to the weather and the part of Japan in which one lives. The Sakura festival, as most spring events among believers, was directed to entreating the kamis (deities) for a good harvest in the fall. The blossoming of the cherry trees was a good omen of the coming abundance. At the same time, the public nature of trees' display has tended to drive people from the shrines to the outdoors and certainly put everyone, whether Shinto or Buddhist or other, in a festive mood.

The particular tree that is the subject of the festival, the Yoshino cherry tree, is peculiar in several ways. It produces an amazing amount of blossoms, but very few seeds, and must be propagated from cuttings. Its blossom is also very short lived, and this contributed to its symbolic nature as a sign of the brevity of life. This element was used during World War II to motivate the armed forces, especially pilots. It was often used to decorate war planes, including those assigned to suicide missions.

Apart from the strict religious significance of the cherry blossom in Japan, the government has used it as a positive force in foreign relations. In 1912, for example, it gave 3,020 cherry blossom trees to the United States, the gift being occasioned by the need to destroy Washington's previously existing trees due to a disease that had infested them. The gift was also meant as a sign of friendship between the two countries, and those trees still line the capital's Tidal Basin and remain a major Washington tourist site.

In 1915, the U.S. government gave Japan a number of flowering dogwood trees. In 1926, the Japanese government made a similar gift to



A young girl, balanced on her father's shoulders, reaches up to touch the cherry blossoms at Ueno Park in Tokyo on April 5, 2009. (Yoshikazu Tsuno/AFP/Getty Images)

Philadelphia on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. As part of her beautification program, Lady Bird Johnson, the wife of president Lyndon B. Johnson, accepted a further 3,800 trees in 1965. This latter gift proved fortuitous, as Japan suffered a major loss of trees in due to a flood, and in 1981, the American tress provided cutting for their recovery. Meanwhile, in 1957, a group from the U.S. State Department worked with some officials at the Japanese Embassy in Washington to found the Japan-America Society of Washington, which has worked on Japanese-American relations in nondiplomatic channels and now sponsors many Sakura Matsuri events in the nation's capital.

While the Washington Cherry Blossom Festival is the most heralded in the United States, it is by no means the only one. Besides Philadelphia, other celebrations are found in, for example, Macon, Georgia; Brooklyn, New York; and Newark, New Jersey.

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See also Aizen Summer Festival; Aki Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Koshogatsu; Nagasaki Kunchi; Natsu Matsuri; Onbashira.

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Sakya Dawa Festival

The Sakya Dawa, which occurs on the 15th day (full moon) of the 4th lunar month of the Tibetan calendar, is the Tibetan celebration of what is elsewhere known as Wesak (or Vesak), the combined celebration of the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment day, and death day. Gautama Buddha was born at Lumbini (in what is now Nepal). He attained enlightenment some 35 years later at Bodh Gaya, India, and died in his 80s at Kusinagara, India. Following indications in some of the early Buddhist texts, Tibetans have, as most Theravada Buddhists, adopted the position that Gautama Buddha was born, found enlightenment, and died on the same day of the year. On the Common Era calendar, this day usually falls in May or June. For Tibetans, this day also marked the transition from spring to summer and

the beginning of the several months of pleasant weather when they could relax in the outdoors.

For Buddhists, this day was the most holy of commemorative days. It was a fitting occasion for the reading/chanting of the sutras (books believed to be records of the Buddha's discourses) and a variety of actions symbolic of veneration of and devotion to the Buddha's teachings. Among the more notable celebrations of Sakya Dawa occurs in Gangtok, Sikkim, India. The local monks carry the sutras containing the discourses of Gautama Buddha from the Tsuk-La-Khang Monastery, where the Sikkim royal family worships, in a procession around the town. In Lhasa, believers will join in a procession circling the old city (a practice termed circumambulation) ending up at a part at the foot of the Potala Palace for a picnic. Believers who find themselves in Dharamsala will also walk around the Dalai Lama's residence/temple complex, often making repeated prostration as they make their pilgrimage. Thousands of pilgrims find their way to one of the sacred mountains of Tibet, where they could, for example, climb Gephel Ri, the peak behind Drepung Monastery, to burn juniper incense, or travel to Mount Kailash to circumambulate it.

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See also Chokhor Duchon; Lingka Woods Festival; Losar; Nehan; Wesak/Vesak.

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Samantabhadhara's Birthday

Samantabhadhara (also known as the bodhisattva Universal Worthy or in Japan as Fugen-bosatsu and in China as Puxian) is one of the primary bodhisattvas in the Mahayana tradition and appears as one of the prime characters in the Avatamsaka or Flower Garland (Adornment) Sutra, along with Guatama Buddha and Manjushri. Toward the end of the sutra, he makes the 10 vows common to the bodhisattva path:

1. To worship and pay respect to all Buddhas.
2. To praise all the Buddhas.
3. To make abundant offerings (i.e., give generously).
4. To repent of all karmic hindrances.
5. To rejoice in others' merits and virtue.
6. To request that the Dharma Wheel continue to be turned (i.e., that teaching activity continue).

7. To request the Buddhas to remain in the world.
8. To follow the teachings of the Buddhas at all times.
9. To accommodate and benefit all living beings.
10. To constantly transfer all merits and virtues to benefit all beings.

From these vows, Samantabadhara is often associated with Dharma practice, most notably, the effort and focus required to follow one's religious obligations. He is often pictured seated on a white elephant with six tusks, and is said to reside on Mount Emei in Sichuan Province, one of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism, and noted as its patron. Veneration of Samantabadhara/Puxian dates to the third century, when the Chinese monk Huichi built the Puxian Temple (now known as Wannian Temple) there. Then in 964 CE, the Song emperor Taizi (927–976) sent a large Buddhist mission of some 300 people under the leadership of a monk named Jiye to India. Upon their return, the emperor authorized Jiye to construct several temples on Mount Emei, and to cast a bronze statue, some 62 tons in weight and 28 feet high, of Puxian. The statue now resides in the Wannian Temple.

Samantabadhara has a special role in the groups of the Nichiren tradition who privilege the Lotus Sutra above all Buddhist writings. In the 28th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he emerges as the protector of its and its disciples. He tells the Buddha, “if there is someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, I will guard and protect him, free him from decline and harm, see that he attains peace and tranquility, and make certain that no one can spy out and take advantage of his shortcomings.” He emphasizes this vow with another: “I now therefore employ my transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. And after the Thus Come One [the Buddha] has entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa [a continent surrounding the mythical mountain Sumeru] and will see that it never comes to an end.”

The Universal Worthy Sutra, seen by Nichiren Buddhists as an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra, describes Samantabadhara's beneficence and power, how believers can meditate on him, and the benefit they gain from their meditations.

In the Chinese tradition, Samantabadhara's birthday is celebrated on the 21st of the second month, two days after Guan Yin's birthday. Because of Samantabadhara's association with Mount Emei, it is one focus of celebrations.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Amitabha's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Mahasthamaprabhata's Birthday; Manjushri's Birthday.

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Samhain (October 31)

Samhain is considered by most Wiccans and Neo-Pagans as the beginning of the ritual year (based on a belief that it was the Celtic New Year), though some treat Imbolc, the start of the new agricultural season, as the beginning. Traditionally, it was a time to consider death—the end of summer and a time to kill animals and prepare them as food to be stored for the coming winter. Today, it is celebrated primarily by the community of Pagans and Witches (Wiccans) that has been generated from the effort to revive Witchcraft by Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964). While Gardnerian Wicca is but one strain of modern neo-Pagan and Wiccan belief and practice, the new community shares many of the practices, such as the celebration of Samhain, which Gardner initially presented to the contemporary world. Beginning with Gardner's insights, modern Wiccans and Pagans have expanded consideration of the meaning of the holidays, while maintaining (often without acknowledgment) most of Gardner's original perspectives.

For modern Wiccans and Pagans, Samhain is a time to consider the dead, especially those who have died in the previous 12 months. Pagans meet in small groups (termed covens, groves, nests, etc.) and at Samhain, members or loved ones of members who might have died will become the focus of remembrance rituals. If there is a mediumistic member, attempts might be made to contact the deceased for a word of greeting, there being an underlying belief that the veil between living and dead is the thinnest on this evening. It is also a time to lay to rest the negative events in the member's lives (i.e., things that died or were lost during the year, such as relationships, a job, or valued possessions), and to refocus on the coming year.

After the evening's ritual, it is time to celebrate with food and drink. Apple bobbing is also a popular activity. Apples have notable connotations for Pagans. Cut in half, the center of an apple presents a pentagram, an important symbol for Wiccans. The apple may also be used for divination. It can be peeled in one continuous effort and the peeling tossed over one's shoulder. The letter formed by the peel is believed to be an initial of a future lover or spouse.

Halloween is a modern Christian holiday that appropriated many elements from the European Pagan religions it supplanted. The image of the Christian Satan was borrowed from the Pagan's Horned God, and many of the associations of Halloween with witches and spirits, though now highly secularized, reflect the Church's distorted memory of Paganism and the struggle to eradicate it. (Modern Pagans are still very insistent of separating themselves from any hint of Satan or Satanism.)

J. Gordon Melton

See also All Saints Day; All Souls Day; Beltane; Eostara; Fall Equinox; Halloween; Imbolc; Lammass; Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Feast of the; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Wicca/Neo-Paganism Liturgical Calendar; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Sanghamitta Day

Sanghamitta Day is a unique Sri Lankan Buddhist holiday that celebrates the arrival of Arahata Sanghamitta Therani (280–220 BCE) in the country in 245 BCE. This event was important in the conversion of the country to Buddhism and became significant for the spread of the ordered community of Buddhist nuns internationally. Sanghamitta was the daughter of the Indian king Ashoka (c. 304–232 BCE), who united much of the subcontinent in a series of wars, the horror of warfare becoming the occasion of his becoming a devout Buddhist. He subsequently spent his life spreading Buddhism internationally. His children Mahinda and Sanghamitta joined the Buddhist monastic orders.

Around 247 BCE, Mahinda introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. As the faith spread, the wife of one of the sub-kings on the island indicated her desire to become a nun. Mahinda, being a male, could not honor her request, but did ask his father to send Sanghamitta to the island. She arrived a short time later at Jambukolapattana (today called Point Pedro) bearing as a gift a branch of the Bodhi Tree, under which Gautama Buddha (563–483 BCE) was sitting when he reached the enlightened state. His enlightenment was the founding event of Buddhism.

As recorded in the Mahavamsa, the national chronicle of Sri Lankan history, she was met upon her arrival by Mahinda and an entourage from the capital. Together, they made a formal procession to Anuradhapura, where their first act was the planting of the Bodhi Tree at a previously prepared site.

Next, a short time later, Sanghamitta led in the ordination of Queen Anula and a group of 500 women, thus establishing the Buddhist monastic order for women (the Bhikkhunii Sa'ngha) in Sri Lanka. From Sri Lanka, the order would spread to China and from there to other countries. Sanghamitta remained in Sri Lanka with her brother, working with him to establish Buddhism among the population.

Sanghamitta Day is celebrated in Sri Lanka and among Sri Lankans abroad on the full moon near the winter solstice (in what is the month of December on the Western calendar). This day is a time of pilgrimage to Anuradhapura and the Bodhi Tree site. The original Bodhi Tree would not survive the ravages of changing religious rule in India, and cuttings from the Sri Lankan tree were returned to India to become the basis of the present Bodhi Tree seen at Bodh Gaya. The Sri Lankan tree has subsequently become the oldest living tree with a known planting date. It is regarded by Sri Lankans as the oldest historically authenticated tree in the world.

Buddhists will also gather for worship services on Sanghamitta Day, a time in which women will assume a prominent leadership role.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Duruthu Poya; Festival of the Tooth; Poson; Winter Solstice.

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Sankt Placidusfest (July 11)

The festival of Saint Placidus, held annually on July 11 at Disentis in the canton of Grisons in Switzerland, celebrates the life and death of one of several saints named Placidus associated with the Benedictines. One Saint Placidus was a companion of Saint Benedict and the son of the man who gave Benedict the Abbey at Monte Casino, Italy. A second Placidus emerged in Switzerland a century later. A wealthy

land owner, when still a young man, he met the monk Sigisbert, and in 614 CE, turned over the land for an abbey, and then professed vows and joined the abbey he had help found. As the story goes, in 670, the abbey was attacked, and both Sigisbert and Placidus were killed defending it. They were both treated as martyrs.

More critical historical work on the history of the monastery has suggested that it was not founded until early in the eighth century. Recent archaeological investigations have shown the existence of a structure built in or about 700. This structure was destroyed in about 940, an act attributed to raiding Saracens. This later research has not stopped the annual honoring of the two martyr saints whose relics they possess and who are still honored by the current residents.

Each year on July 11, the relic of Saints Placidus and Sigisbert are carried out of the abbey in a procession to the Dissentis parish church and back to the abbey through the village. Parishoners join the monks in the procession to chant a very long song about Saint Placidus.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Benedict of Nursia, Saint's Day of St.

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San Sebastian Day (January 20)

Saint Sebastian (d. c. 288) was a Christian who died in the persecutions unleashed upon the church by the emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305) and went on to become one of the most popular of saints/martyrs in the medieval period. He is usually portrayed with his body tied to a post and penetrated by many arrows. We know little of Sebastian apart from his martyrdom.

What little we can glean of Sebastian's life comes from Saint Ambrose (c. 340–397), the long-term bishop of Milan. In a sermon, he noted that Sebastian had come from Milan and as a young man had been appointed as a captain in the Praetorian Guard. During his stay in prison prior to his death, he was said to have been an encouraging voice to his fellow Christians, the source of several miracles, and the instrument of converting several hundred non-Christian prisoners.

According to the story of Sebastian, he was tied, used for target practice, and left for dead. He was not dead, however, and a woman retrieved his body and nursed him back to health. He later publicly spoke against the emperor, who then had him beaten to death and his body cast in a privy. His body was later recovered by the Christian community, which buried it in the catacombs. Two stories are told of his relics. One claims that they were placed in *Basilica Apostolorum*, built by Pope Damasus I in Rome in

367, That church is now known as the church of San Sebastiano fuori le mura. Another account claims that the remains were taken to France, to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Medard, at Soissons, during the renovation and expansion of the abbey under its abbot Hilduin (r. 822–830). Hilduin is said to have obtained them in 826 from Pope Eugene II (r. 824–826) along with the relics of Saint Gregory the Great.

Saint Sebastian's Day is January 20 on the Roman Catholic calendar. He was among a group of soldier saints who became very important in the Middle Ages and were called upon in times when armies threatened. He was also associated with protection from the plague. As such, he became part of what were termed the Fourteen Holy Helpers, a group of saints often venerated because of their reputation as protectors from different diseases. While most of the 14 saints, including Sebastian, remain on the current Roman Catholic calendar of saints individually, the practice of calling upon the 14 as a group was strongly discouraged amid the revisions of the calendar in 1969, following the Second Vatican Council.

Sebastian is the patron saint of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (whose official name is *São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro*), and his feast day is a public holiday in the city. Around Brazil and all of Latin America, places named for San Sebastian hold both religious and public celebrations. In San Sebastián, Spain, an annual festival called the *Tamborrada* has been held since the 19th century. It featured a procession from the Santa Maria Church in the old part of town to the San Sebastián Church. The event concluded with the people dancing to the accompaniment of a military band's flutes and drums. Today, the festival has been highly secularized, with people dressed as cooks and soldiers, marching around the city and the sounds of drums filling the air.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches, Sebastian's feast day is December 18.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Agnes, Feast Day of St.; Florian, Saint's Day of St.; George, Feast Day of St.; Lucy, Saint's Day of St.

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Sarada Devi, Birthday of (December 22)

Sarada Devi (1853–1920) was the wife of Indian spiritual teacher Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the guru of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who founded the Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the Vedanta societies, the first Hindu organizations in the West.

When only five, Sarada Devi was betrothed to Ramakrishna, and during her late teens she joined him at the Kali temple as Dakshineswar. As Ramakrishna had

taken the vows of the renounced life and become a sannyasin, the marriage was never consummated. He had also become a mystic and contemplative, and had come to view the Kali as his mother and the mother of the universe. He focused attention on his wife as the incarnation of Divine Mother (an incarnation of the goddess Durga as Kali) and his disciples accepted her as such.

Unassuming and in the background, she gained a few disciples prior to Ramakrishna's death, and then assumed a role as a spiritual adviser to the Ramakrishna disciples through the last three decades of her life. She continued to be revered as an incarnation of the goddess. Following her death on July 20, 1920, her body was cremated at the monastery in Belur, India.

After her death, Sarada Devi remained the focus of many females who had come to associate with the Ramakrishna Math and its all-male leadership. She would inspire the formation of the Ananda Ashrama in the United States, an offshoot of the Vedanta Society with all-female leadership. Then in 1954, Swami Shankarananda (1880–1962), the head of the Ramakrishna Math, led in the founding of the Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, two monastic organizations for the nuns previously associated with the Ramakrishna Math, to both honor Sarada Devi and respond to the new role being assumed by women in Indian society.

Today, the birthday of Sarada Devi is celebrated at all the centers throughout the spectrum of organizations that grew from the work of Swami Vivekananda as inspired by Ramakrishna. The celebration will take the form of a gathering that will include meditation, chanting, and inspirational talks on the spirituality and accomplishments of Sarada Devi. The celebration may last a few hours or all day at different locations. In 2004, a variety of celebrations were held occasioned by the 150th anniversary of Sarada Devi.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ramakrishna, Birthday of Sri; Vivekananda, Birthday of Swami.

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Satchidananda, Birthday of Swami (December 22)

Swami Satchidananda (1914–2002), a disciple of Indian spiritual teacher Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963), brought the teachings of the Divine Life

Society to the United States. Satchidananda went on to establish himself as a major teacher of hatha yoga and the founder of Integral Yoga International, the organization of his disciples.

Though raised in a very devout atmosphere, as a young man, he married and began a business career. His wife, however, died only a few years into the marriage, and the future swami began a period of spiritual quest that led him in 1949 to Swami Sivananda and the Divine Life Society, in Rishikesh, which he headed. Sivananda accepted him into the vows of the renounced life as a *sannyasin*. At that time, he took the spiritual name by which he became known. He became a field representative for the society, and came to the United States in the 1960s at the insistence of some American students. He founded an Intergal Yoga Institute in New York, the base from which a network of additional centers developed, all of which became focused at the Satchidananda Ashram in Yoga-ville, Virginia.

At Yogaville, his belief in interfaith work came to the fore under the motto, "Truth is One, Paths are Many." He oversaw the building of the Light of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS) at Yogaville, which included altars for each of the major world religions, dedicated in 1986.

Satchidananda built a large following in the West and a large network of religious leaders from various religious communities who accepted his approach concerning the basic unity of religions as different expressions of a single truth. By the 1980s, Satchidananda's disciples began organizing annual birthday celebrations at which they would gather, and various religious leaders would be invited to speak and lead in worship. In addition, a group of his disciples founded the Lifelights Network into which they invited anyone from around the world who have felt that his or her life had been enriched by contact with Swami Satchidananda. Members of the network are invited to honor him by doing acts of kindness and service in their community on the 22nd day of each month (thus memorializing Satchidananda's birthday on December 22).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Sivananda Saraswati, Birthday of Swami.

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Sava, Saint's Day of St. (January 12 or 14)

The Serbian Orthodox Church traces its roots to the initial efforts of missionaries based in Constantinople in the last half of the ninth century CE. When Serbia became independent of Constantinople toward the end of the 10th century, under its first ruler, Steven Nemanja (1168–1196), Christianity was still a minority religion. The transformation of Christianity into a majority religion is largely credited to Steven's son Prince Rastko Nemanjic (c. 1176–1235), later to be known as Saint Sava.

As a young man, Rastko moved to Greece and joined the monastic community on Mount Athos, where he received his religious name Sava (after a fifth-century Palestinian saint named Sabbas). Steven joined him for a period, and they restored an abandoned monastery as a new center for Serbians in the monastic life. Steven eventually became a monk and took the name Simeon, under which he would later be canonized. Sava remained at Athos until 1207. He returned to find Serbia split between his rival brothers.

Sava brought his father's body with him, and called his fighting brothers to join him in a proper funeral service. At the funeral, the casket was opened, and a sweet smell flowed outward. Steven has since been known as Saint Simeon the Myrrh-flowing. Shortly thereafter, the schism was healed, and Sava could turn to evangelizing the nation.

Saint Sava then persuaded the Ecumenical Patriarchate to establish the Serbian Church as an autonomous entity. In doing so, the patriarch consecrated Sava as the church's first archbishop, on the feast day of Saint Nicholas, December 6. Among his first acts was to consecrate his brother as the first king of Serbia.

Sava worked through the remainder of the decade to build the Serbian Church. In 1229, he left for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, only to have his brothers again divide the land and go to war. The war was short, with the younger brother winning and assuming the throne. Sava abdicated in 1233 and appointed a pupil to succeed him. The next year, he returned for an even more extended tour of the Holy Land. On his return, he stopped in Bulgaria and was participating in a worship service when he developed a cough. He contracted pneumonia and died January 14, 1235, without reaching Serbia.

He was initially buried in Bulgaria, but his body was returned to Serbia in 1237 and buried at a monastery in southern Serbia. In 1253, the Serbian Orthodox Church officially canonized their deceased archbishop as Saint Sava. After the Ottoman Turks overran Serbia, they dug up Sava's relics and publicly burned them in Belgrade. April 27 (May 10 on the Common Era calendar) is commemorated throughout the Serbian Church. In 2004, the Serbian Church dedicated the Saint Sava Church in Belgrade on the spot where his bones were burned. The church is currently hailed as the largest active Orthodox Church structure in the world, rivaling the Cathedral of the Savior in Moscow.

Meanwhile, a variety of healings had been attached to the relics. He became the patron saint of the nation he helped create. On Saint Sava Day, January 14 (Julian)

or January 27 (Common Era calendar), it has become common since the 19th century for schoolchildren in Serbia to have musical recitals in nearby churches.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts.; Evtimiy of Bulgaria, Saint's Day of Patriarch; Saint Stephen's Day (Hungary).

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Schaferlauf. See Bartholomew's Day, Saint

Schneerson, Anniversary of the Death of Rabbi Menachem Mendal

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994) headed the Chabad-Lubavitcher Hasidic movement for over four decades during the crucial years after World War II and the Jewish Holocaust. He was born in the Ukraine, and lived in various places in Europe. He escaped from France in 1941 and made his way to the United States.

In 1928, Schneerson married Chaya Mushka, the daughter of Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn (1880–1950), the Chabad-Lubavitcher Hasidic leader or rebbe. The elder Schneersohn arrived in New York in 1940. He died in 1950 leaving no sons behind, and thus his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was chosen as his successor. Over the next 40 years, the charismatic Schneerson led in the development of the Lubavitcher community as a global Hasidic movement.

During the 1990s, Messianic themes became prominent among the Lubavitcher membership, initially as a concern to hasten the arrival of what was felt to be an imminent Messianic age and then the accumulation of images and ideas around Schneerson personally as the Messiah or Anointed One. These considerations were peaking when Schneerson died on June 12, 1994 (or Tammuz 3, 5754, on the Jewish calendar). He was buried next to his father-in-law at Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, Long Island, New York, within the previously built shrine (or *ohel*).

Views of Schneerson among the Lubavitch vary widely. All respect him for his 40 years of leadership and service. Many believe him to be the Messiah and await his return. Some ascribe miraculous and divine powers to him, and consult his writings for various hidden messages, on occasion using them for divinatory

purposes. Many, especially those residing in the New York City area, will make a pilgrimage to his grave site on the anniversary of his death, Tammuz 3, which usually occurs in May or June on the Common Era calendar. Some 50,000 gathered in 2010 for the 24-hour observance. Those who are able to approach the tomb will leave write prayer requests on small bits of paper and leave them at the tomb. Most will spend time in prayer, remembrance, and look for inspiration from what is believed the continuing spirit of the late rabbi.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Confucius, Anniversary of the Death of; Data Ganj Bakhsh Death Anniversary.

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Schutzengelfest (July)

Schutzengelfest, or the Festival of the Guardian Angel, is an annual observance that occurs on the second Sunday in July at the Wildkirchli, a cave in the Alpstein Mountain range in the Appenzell Innerrhoden canton of Switzerland. The cave has been the site of numerous prehistoric discoveries. The event dates to 1621, when a Capuchin monk concluded that the cave was an ideal place for a mountain worship service. He tried out the idea, but changed his residence after a few years, and the practice was dropped. Then an Appenzell priest named Paulus Ulmann revived the idea. In 1679, he established a foundation to provide financial support for the continued annual observance, and that foundation continues to exist.

Thus, on the second Sunday of July, a priest and those who wish to join him will make the trek to the cave and join in a worship service that concludes with a concert by the yodelers' choir. Afterward, attendees return to the nearby villages of Ebenalp and Aescher to continue the celebration with food, drink, and dancing.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Agua, La Fiesta de.

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Schwenkfelder Thanksgiving (September 24)

The Schwenkfelder Church is a small Christian group that was formed by people attracted to the mystical teachings of Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489–1561). Schwenckfeld was a well-to-do German nobleman at the time of the Protestant Reformation. He took the Protestant protest in a mystical direction, having come to believe that external things, though people might use them, were manifestations of the perishable material world. He came to value the spiritual imperishable reality behind the material. He discovered what he sought in the inner word, faith, liberty, an invisible spiritual sacrament, and a fellowship of those he considered redeemed and called.

The small group found all of the major Reformation groups refused to accept them, and through the 18th century, they remained a persecuted minority. Thus, in 1734, as a group they decided to leave Silicia and migrate to the United States. On September 24, just prior to their departure, the group gathered to offer thanks for the deliverance from years of persecution and discrimination. Once in the New World, the several thousand members of the six remaining Schwenkfelder churches have continued to gather annually for a thanksgiving service, now held on the Sunday closest to September 24.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Reformation Sunday.

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Scientology, Holidays of the Church of

The Church of Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) as his consideration of the human situation and most importantly, the nature of the human individual as a body, mind, and spirit matured. Hubbard, a writer, former U.S. Navy officer, and explorer, began intense consideration of the plight of humankind as early as the 1930s and initially published his early conclusions in the 1940s. His work reached a significant plateau with the 1950 publication, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, which presented his alternative conclusions relative to contemporary psychology about the human mind and the way

to health and wholeness. Further work on the exploration of the inner self led him to reorient his perspective around the human spirit, which he termed the “Thetan.” By 1952, he had begun to articulate the basics of Scientology, and the first local Scientology church was founded in Los Angeles, California, in 1954.

Scientology is a Gnostic-Western Esoteric religion. It posits the Thetan as the essential eternal self (the soul or spirit), believes that the Thetan is trapped in the body due to its forgetfulness of its own past, and offers the technology of Scientology as the method by which the Thetan can be freed from all encumbrances to realize its full potential. Hubbard is credited with discovering the best and most efficient means of freeing the Thetan, and Scientology is thus seen as having been one of the most important discoveries in human history. In addition, Hubbard is seen as a Renaissance man, accomplished in a variety of fields from music to corporate management and educational theory. Above and beyond Scientology narrowly defined, Scientologists laud Hubbard for his contributions in a variety of fields.

Like other Western Esoteric religious bodies, church life in Scientology is organized around the progressive revelation of its teachings as members read through Hubbard’s many writings, appropriate the truths received in church instructions, engage in the self-exploration provided by auditing (counseling), and demonstrate mastery of the material covered. At the higher levels, the instructional material is confidential and not available to either nonmembers or members in the more elementary and intermediate levels of church life. In this manner, the church follows the precedents set by other esoteric religions that preceded it.

As the church of Scientology has grown and developed, it has designated a variety of events as worthy of commemoration, the most important by far being the birthday of the church’s founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the first major event of the calendar year. It is followed by six major holidays and a variety of lesser ones.

The seven major holidays on the Scientologist’s calendar are:

Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron Hubbard (March 13)

Anniversary of *Dianetics* (May 9)

Anniversary of the Maiden Voyage of the *Freewinds* (June 6)

Sea Org Day (August 12)

Auditor’s Day (Second Sunday in September)

International Association of Scientologists Anniversary (October 7)

New Year’s Eve (December 31)

These holidays celebrate major events in Scientology’s relatively brief history, beginning with Hubbard’s birth (1911), the publication of *Dianetics* in 1950, the development of the church’s elite fraternity, the Sea Organization, and the opening of the new center for the highest level of Scientology’s religious life, the oceangoing vessel *Freewinds*. The church completes each year with a gathering to celebrate its accomplishments and project future goals.

Among the many lesser commemorations are the National Founding Day that is celebrated by the Scientology church in each country to remember its own unique beginning, and/or its official recognition by local authorities as a new ecclesiastical body. The anniversaries of the founding of the different upper level organizations of the church and the release of different higher levels of church teachings.

While a major holiday celebrates the church-wide organization fighting for religious freedom, the International Association of Scientologists, there are also celebrations for those working in other church-sponsored programs—for example, Narconon (February 19) and Criminon (January 25), which constitute the church's direct effort against the international plague of narcotics. CCHR Day (March 5) celebrates the work of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights to fight what the church views as abuses in the psychiatric field. Most of the celebrations of these lesser holidays do not involve the larger membership at the local church level.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Auditor's Day; *Dianetics*, Anniversary of; Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; International Association of Scientologists Anniversary; Maiden Voyage Anniversary; National Founding Day (Scientology); New Year's Eve (Scientology); Sea Org Day.

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Sea Org Day (August 12)

The Sea Organization (or Sea Org) is an elite corps of dedicated Scientologists. Members lead an ordered life and make vows analogous to monastic vows, though they are allowed to marry if their spouse is also a Sea Org member. Members sign a billion-year covenant (based on their belief in reincarnation), vowing to work full time for the spread of Scientology in future incarnations.

The Sea Org was founded August 12, 1967, and originally assigned the duty to deliver what was the highest levels of Scientology teachings to the membership. The first two of what were termed the OT (Operating Thetan) levels had been released the previous year, and church founder L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) had retired from all his administrative positions in the church to spend the rest of his life developing the higher levels of Scientology teachings and training. The Sea Org was formed from people who had been among the first graduates of the course and who were ready to dedicate themselves to Scientology's future. Then, through the 1970s into the 1980s, the Church of Scientology went through a major reorganization at the highest level and the Sea Org's role expanded to include not only the delivery of the new OT levels (currently, OT VIII is the highest level) but the management and administration of the church above the local



Dormitories provide a home for nearly 400 Sea Organization members in San Jacinto, California. Sea Organization members are Scientologists who make a commitment to their faith, similar to monastic vows. (AP/Wide World Photos)

church level. All international offices in the church are currently held by Sea Org members.

The Sea Org has become a focal point of the intense controversy which has surrounded the Church in recent decades. Its members often are seen in naval-style uniforms, and in spite of the lack of any training in firearms or physical self-defense in their training, critics have pictured them as a paramilitary group. There have also been complaints, primarily by ex-members, of excesses within the internal rehabilitation program for Sea Org members who violate church rules or their vows. The church has denied that any such excesses have occurred, and that most of the complaints have derived from a lack of appreciation of the religious commitments made by Sea Org members.

Sea Org members work six and a half days a week on behalf of Scientology. On August 12, each year, they take a holiday. There are gatherings at the Sea Org managed church centers in Los Angeles, Clearwater (Florida), Saint Hill (England), Copenhagen, and Sydney, at which honors and promotions are announced, the history and accomplishments of the organization are acknowledged and celebrated, and commitments are renewed. The rest of the day is spent in a festive atmosphere.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hubbard, Birthday of L. Ron; Scientology, Holidays of the Church of.

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Sechi Festival (January 4–7)

The Sechi Festival is an annual New Year's celebration held at the headquarters of the Tenrikyo religion at Tenri City in Japan. Tenrikyo, one of Japan's new religions, was founded in 1838 by Miki Nakayama (1798–1887), known by her religious name Oyasama, a farm wife who found herself entering trance states during which she spoke as if God were speaking through her. She subsequently began a teaching phase of her life that lasted some 50 years, and she taught a mystical view of the world that had roots in Shinto. These teachings were later compiled into a book called the *Ofudesaki* ("Tip of the Writing Brush") that now serves as the Tenrikyo book of scriptures.

The Sechi Festival grew out of the practice of Tenrikyo groups around Japan sending rice cakes to Tenri City at the beginning of the new year for the New Year's Day service at the Jiba, the site that is believed to be the center of creation. On January 4, these rice cakes would be taken from the main sanctuary, cut into small pieces, and mixed into a broth dish called *zoni*, which would be served to people visiting the church facilities at Tenri City on January 5–7.

During Oyasama's life, people who gathered with her for New Year's partook of the rice cakes with her in a merry atmosphere. As years passed, the amount of rice cakes available for consumption grew steadily. The informal New Year's gatherings evolved into the Sechi Festival. It was discontinued during World War II, but revived in 1956, the 70th anniversary of Oyasama's death. It draws more than 100,000 people annually.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Koshogatsu; New Year's Day; Setsubun.

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Seijin no Hi (January)

Seijin no Hi, or Coming of Age Day, celebrates the transition to adulthood in Japan. Unlike Shichi-Go-San and Kodomo no Hi, similar days for young children,

Seijin no Hi is a national holiday and especially important to those reaching their 20th birthday when they become eligible to vote and to consume alcohol. It is celebrated on the second Monday of January.

Seijin no Hi was officially recognized in 1948, but has a history that reaches back into the period of the Shogunate. Samurai families would hold a ceremony to recognize male children as adults in a ceremony known as “Gempuku.” It would include the adoption of an adult name, and the presentation of an adult hairpiece called “Eboshi.” After this time, the youth would begin to assume adult duties and become eligible for marriage. The young girls of Samurai families would go through a corresponding ceremony termed “Mogi,” normally between the ages of 12 and 16. They would be given a kimono and afterward be allowed to dress as an adult female.

With the Meiji restoration in 1868, this coming-of-age ceremony became common among the general population, aided by a 1876 law setting the age of adulthood at 20 (much higher than in previous centuries). In the modern world, the practice has been highly secularized. The government sponsors gatherings at which speeches are given on the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. The main event, however, is the fashion show, the day providing an opportunity for women to purchase an expensive new kimono and wear traditional clothing. While most men dress up in Western clothes, many will also don traditional male attire.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Doll Festival; Kodomo no Hi; Shichi-Go-San.

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Seton, Saint's Day of Mother Elizabeth (January 4)

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton (1774–1821) was the first person born in what is now the United States to be named by the Roman Catholic Church as a saint. Seton was born in New York City and raised as an Episcopalian, one of her grandfathers being an Episcopal priest. She married and became the mother of five children. In 1805, she converted to Catholicism, then very much a minority faith in New York. Four years later, she moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where, in conjunction with some French Sulpicians who had left postrevolutionary France, she established Saint Joseph's Academy and Free School, a school for girls. The school provided the base from which she founded a non-cloistered order of nuns (the first founded in the United States), the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph. Its original special mission was to the children of the poor. She devoted the last years of her rather short life to building the order. She died in 1821 in Emmitsburg, and

her body now rests in the basilica at what has become the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.

A century and a half later, with Catholicism having grown into a large national organization in the United States, Seton began to receive attention for her pioneering effort. She was declared venerable in 1959, beatified by Pope John XXIII (r. 1958–1963) in 1963, and canonized by Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) in 1975. Her feast day was set on January 4. In 2009, in an unusual step, the Episcopal Church (based in the United States) added Seton to its calendar of saints, with her feast day also set on January 4.

The national shrine commemorating Seton's life and work is now one of the most visited pilgrimage sites for American Catholics.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Rose of Lima, Saint's Day of St.; Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint's Day of St.

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Setsubun

The Japanese adopted a lunar calendar with 12 months each with two parts related to the new and full moon, thus giving it 24 segments. The end of each segment and the division marking it from the next segment was termed the Setsubun (or seasonal division). Over time, the term Setsubun began to particularly refer to the division at the end of the year and hence immediately before the lunar New Year. The New Year came as winter ended and spring began, which was believed to be the first week of February. Today the Setsubun festival is held in Japan on February 3 or 4, the day before the start of spring. The spring Setsubun festival came to be associated with rituals for chasing away evil spirits.

The practices of the spring Setsubun appear to have originated in folk traditions, but over the centuries were adopted by both Shinto and Buddhist temples. By the 13th century, for example, people attempted to drive away evil spirits by mixing the stench of burning dried sardine heads and wood with the noise of drums. This custom survives in the use of fish head shapes as house decorations, the intention being to keep spirits away from the home.

Today, the most common practice of Setsubun is the throwing of roasted soybeans. They may be thrown around one's house or at temples and shrines, or at

people. The act of throwing is accompanied by shouts of “Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!” (“Devils out, happiness in”).

Tied to the tossing of the beans is another custom, eating the number of beans corresponding to your age. This is particularly a practice of people whose age is a multiple of 12, meaning that the year is the same as the year in which they were born (according to the Chinese zodiac). Local news coverage will feature stories on celebrities at different temples consuming beans. In the home, one person, usually the male head of the household (or a male who was celebrating one of his 12th-anniversary birthdays), will put on a demon mask, and the other family members will toss soybeans at him as they chant the traditional *oni wa soto fuku wa uchi*.

In a secularized culture such as Japan, variant celebrations of Setsubun are widespread. Disbelief in the existence of evil spirits is widespread, and many Buddhists offer demythologized explanations for Setsubun celebrations. At the same time, both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples will sponsor ritualized bean-tossing events.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Higan; Nehan; New Year’s Day; Obon Festival(s); Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Seven Sisters Festival. See Double Seventh Festival

Shankaracharya Jayanti

Shankaracharya Jayanti is celebrated as the appearance day (birthday) of Jagad Guru Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE). It is celebrated on the fifth day of the waxing moon in the Indian month of Vaisakha (May–June on the Common Era calendar) in South India. It is celebrated five days later in northern India. Shankaracharya was one of India’s most famous theologian-philosophers and an advocate of what today is known as Advaita Vedanta, a stream of Saivite Hinduism. Advaita Vedanta is a nondualistic worldview that identifies the individual’s essential self (*atman*) with the limitless divine human (*Brahman*).

Shankaracharya was born in the village of Kalady in central Kerala, in southern India (now a pilgrimage site). As a young man, he studied with Govinda Bhagavatpāda and then became a teacher himself. In his quest to propagate Advaita Vedanta, with an entourage of disciples, he traveled around every part of India teaching and debating with various religious leaders. He settled in Kashmir at

Śārada Pīṭham, and while there, bested the other scholars in debate and assumed authority by ascending the throne of transcendent wisdom of that temple.

Shankaracharya went on to found four monasteries placed at strategic points around the Indian subcontinent to guide the people toward the approach to Hinduism he expounded. The head of each of these four monasteries, or mathas, takes the title of Shankaracharya. These four monasteries are located at Sringeri in Karnataka (south), Dwaraka in Gujarat (west), Puri in Orissa (east), and Jyotirmath in Uttarakhand (north). The abbots of these monasteries are among the most respected religious leaders in India. Each traces his authority to one the four men originally appointed by Shankaracharya.

Little is known of either the first or last days of Shankaracharya; even his birth and death dates remain a matter of scholarly discussion. While most place him in the early eighth century, an alternate tradition places him in the fifth century BCE. Irrespective of these discussions, his appearance day is celebrated in the spring each year. Though a prolific author and movement organizer, he died a relatively young man at the age of 32.

Shankaracharya placed his theological work in a Saivite context. One popular legend concerning his birth suggests that his parents received a vision of Lord Shiva in which he promised that he would incarnate in the form of their child. Shankaracharya is also claimed by the Smarta tradition, which emphasizes the centrality and efficacy of temple worship for believers. This tradition looks to Shankaracharya as the founder of the Shanmata system of worship, which builds on Shankaracharya's nondualism to create temples with worship of the six primary (and often competing) deities of Hinduism—Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Ganesha, Surya, and Skanda—based on the belief in the essential oneness of all deities as various manifestations of Brahman, the single divine power.

Shankaracharya is respected at all levels of the Hindu community, and the festival in his honor finds scholars organizing learned discourse on his legacy, especially those residing at the four mathas Shankaracharya founded and their satellite mathas, while temples will organize worshipful events to pay homage. Among Saivites, he is acknowledged as an incarnation of Shiva, and among the Smartas as one who made their distinctive style of temple worship possible. In Kerala, pilgrimages to places associated with him are popular, including his birthplace in Kalady; the shrine of the goddess Mookambika, Mother of the Universe, in Kollur, Karnataka, where he resided for a time; or the Vadakkunnathan Temple, an ancient Shiva temple at Thrissur, Kerala, where it is claimed he passed his last days.

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See also Ashokashtami; Mahashivaratri.

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Sharad Purnima

Sharad Purnima is a Hindu harvest festival celebrated on evening of the full moon of the Hindu lunar month of Ashwin (September–October). The month of Ashwin comes after the annual rainy season, and the festival's major observances are in rural communities.

The celebration is especially directed to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and consort of the god Vishnu, who is said to move around the night asking “Who is awake?” and to those she finds awake, she bestows gifts of wealth. This purnima (full moon) is also known as Kojagara, which translates into “Who is awake?”

The origin of the celebration appears to come from Bihar state where a story is told of a relatively poor brahmin named Valit who left home disgusted with his wife, who was known for her quarrelsome nature. His leaving was occasioned by her disturbing a ritual honoring Valit's ancestors. On his trip, he ran into some young girls who were descendants of Kailiya Nag, the giant venomous snake that Krishna had subdued. Valit began gambling with the girls by the light of the full moon and lost what little money he had with him.

At that moment, however, Lakshmi and Vishnu were passing by. Lakshmi graced Valit with a handsomeness similar to the god of love. The girls with whom he had been gambling now fell in love with him and gave him all their riches. He returned home and lived happily ever after.

On the night of Sharad Purnima, *Dudha-Pauva*, a mixture of parched rice made from the recently harvested crops and soaked in cold milk, will be offered to Chandra, the moon deity and then passed to gathered devotees. Devotees of Durga think of her as having gone into an extended rest following her nine-day war with Mahishasura. On this night, in Durga temples, she will be awakened with music and drumbeats and taken in a torchlit procession around the temple. Devotees of Krishna look upon this night as the anniversary of Krishna's divine play with Radha and the Gopis (cowgirls).

This festival is also known as *Navanna* (or new food). After Kojagara, the new grain of the autumn harvest is deemed ready for consumption. This practice indicates the origins of the festival, which combine a celebration of the harvest and the light provided by the full moon in an era prior to modern electrical lighting. The acknowledgment of Lakshmi coincides with an acknowledgment of the fruits of the harvest.

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See also Chairta Purnima; Diwali; Gaura Purnima; Guru Purnima; Kartika Purnima; Narieli Purnima; Navaratri.

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Shavuot

Shavuot is a Jewish holiday that celebrates God's giving of the Torah (or Law), the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. It is also a spring festival that celebrates the first harvest and with it the ripening of the first fruits. Shavuot is known as the Feast of Weeks or of the First Fruits. Christians have an analogous holiday called Pentecost (covered in a separate entry). Shavuot is a two-day holiday that begins at sundown on the fifth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan (usually May or June on the Common Era calendar). It is one of three pilgrimage holy days in the Jewish calendar, when, in the days prior to the destruction of the temple, Jews would normally travel to Jerusalem for the observance. It appears that the shift of emphasis from the harvest to the remembrance of the giving of the Torah occurred at the time of the Jewish exile in Babylon.

The date of Shavuot is tied to Pesach, which celebrates God's freeing of the Jewish people from their enslavement to Pharaoh; they traveled into the Sinai desert and on Shavuot, God gave them the Law. The people committed themselves as a group to be loyal to God. Shavuot is a national holiday in Israel, which sets aside one day for its observance. Outside Israel, it is generally a two-day celebration except among Reform Jews, who



A view of Mount Sinai in Egypt. The Sinai desert is significant to the Jewish people. It was there that God gave them the Torah, and it was on Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. (Wrangel/Dreamstime.com)

celebrate only one day. While Pesach and Shavuot acknowledge the Exodus events, their dating was also tied to the harvest cycle in Palestine, which began with the harvesting of the barley around Pesach and ended with the harvesting of wheat around Shavuot. Shavuot was the first opportunity each year to bring the *bikkurim* (or first fruits) to the Temple in Jerusalem. The first fruits would include offerings from the seven main plants grown as crops in the region: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (cf. Deuteronomy 8:8).

There are no specific rituals commanded for Shavuot, but a variety of practices has emerged over the centuries. The main event is a service at the synagogue in which the receiving of the Torah is reenacted. It begins with the chanting of a seventh-century prayer, the *Akdamut* (Introduction), followed by the reading of the account of the events at Mount Sinai. The prayer calls upon the Jewish community to remain loyal to their faith. As the Torah reading concludes, the congregation rises and reaffirms their acceptance of it. An important event on the second day of Shavuot is the reading from the Book of Ruth, which tells a story that took place at harvest time. Ruth was a non-Jew who accepted the faith.

In remembrance that at the time of the events at Sinai, the people did not yet know the soon-to-be-observed laws concerning the ritual process for killing animals for food, milk-based foods are the main foods served at meals during Shavuot.

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See also Pesach; Sukkot; Yom Kippur.

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Sheetala Ashtami

Among the lesser-known Hindu deities is Sheetala (or Shitala), but she is worshipped primarily in the small towns and rural areas of North India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, where she is believed to offer protection against epidemics, especially of smallpox. Some have identified her as an aspect of Parvati, the consort of Shiva, or more often as an aspect of Kali, while in South India, her place in the religious culture is filled by the goddess Mariamman. The festival of Sheetala Ashtami is celebrated with the belief that this would prevent them from the deadly epidemics. In temples, the goddess is often represented by a red stone, but is generally pictured as light-complexioned, riding on a donkey, and multi-handed holding a pitcher filled with water and nectar and a broom that she uses to sprinkle water on the people.

Shestala Mata is celebrated on the eighth day of the waxing half of the Hindu month of Chaitra, usually in early April on the Common Era calendar. The festival is celebrated with great excitement in the small towns and is of the occasion of an accompanying fair in which local artisans show off their work. The day will begin with primarily women going to the shrine and making offerings of food to the goddess—rice, sweets, and holy water mixed with milk. During the day, there will be a variety of entertainment as well as religious rituals in which those in attendance may partake.

Among the more notable sites for the Sheetala Ashtami is Chakshu, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

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See also: Ashokashtami; Dasain; Navaratri.

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Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are two closely related holidays that follow immediately on the heels of Sukkot. Sukkot is a seven-day celebration in the Hebrew month of Tishri, concluding on Tishri 21. According to Leviticus (23:33–36):

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: On the 15th day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work. Seven days ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD; it is a day of solemn assembly; ye shall do no manner of servile work.”

Shemini Atzeret is the convocation of which Leviticus speaks. Simchat Torah refers to another event that occurs at this same time, the conclusion (and the new

beginning) of the annual cycle of reading the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible), a few chapters of which are read at each Sabbath service through the year.

While the dating of the two holidays are tied to Sukkot, as is the alternate name of Shemini Atzeret, the Assembly of the Eighth Day, the two holidays are stand-alone celebrations in their own right. In Israel, they are celebrated on the same day. Outside of Israel, they are celebrated over two days, with Shemini Atzeret celebrated on Tishri 22 and Simchat Torah on Tishri 23. Shemini Atzeret is seen as a day in which Israel experiences its special intimate relationship with God. Simchat Torah is a celebration of the Torah. During the worship service, the last verses of Deuteronomy are read, immediately followed by the first chapter of Genesis. The congregation is reminded that the Torah is experienced as a never-ending circle.

As the cycle is completed, however, it is a time for rejoicing. The Torah scrolls are carried around the synagogue in a procession with accompanying singing and dancing. Many of the congregation, including children, will be called forward to offer a prayer over the Torah.

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are holidays on which work is proscribed, and they are observed as an official holidays in Israel.

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See also Sukkot.

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Shichi-Go-San (November 15)

Shichi-Go-San, or Children’s Day, is an unofficial but widely observed festival in the Shinto and Buddhist temples of Japan held annually on November 15 (or the weekend closest to that date). It marks the movement of children into a new stage of childhood, and is centered upon what numerologically are considered lucky years—three, five, and seven. On this day, girls who are three or seven and boys who are three or five will be dressed up for a visit to the local shrine or temple. For female children, it is often their first time to wear a kimono in public, and for the boys, their first time in a hakama. The practice emerged among courtiers at the emperor’s court in Kyoto during the Heian period (794–1185) and passed to the samurai during the years of the Shogunate.

During the reassertion of Shinto following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the celebration became established with the general public, and was associated with a visit to a Shinto shrine (or Buddhist temple) to exorcise any evil spirits and pray for a long healthy life for one's children. The primary development in the post-World War II environment is the designation of the event as a photo opportunity.

Older children have another day in May, *Kodomo no Hi*, while young adults go through a coming-of-age celebration in January called *Seijin no Hi*.

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See also *Kodomo no Hi*; *Seijin no Hi*.

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Shikinensengu

Shikinensengu refers to the planned renewal of the Ise Jinju Shrine, which occurs every 20 years. The main steps of the renewal process are the construction of a new shrine, the movement of the enshrined deities into their new home, and the destruction of the former shrine and the assignment of its site as the site of the next renewal.

The shrine is some 2,000 years old, but it was the emperor Temmu (c. 631–686) who first suggested the *sengu* or renewal system. His successor, the empress Jitō (645–702) had the *sengu* ceremony performed for the first time for the Inner Shrine in 690 and for the Outer Shrine two years later. In the 10th century, the renewal process became a matter of national law, and an agency was set up to take charge of the event. The legislation provided for the use of public funds and specified the timing of the ceremony and the transfer of the deity. Due to unrest in the country, the ceremony did not happen for more than a century between 1462 and 1585.

While the renewal of the main shrine occurs within a single year, the total renewal takes years, and means the reconstruction of more than 60 structures including all of the treasure houses, offering halls, sacred fences, *torii* gateways, and the buildings of 14 "auxiliary sanctuaries." In addition, all of the offerings of vestments and sacred treasures that have been presented by the imperial family also have to be replaced.

At each stage of the renewal process, specific appropriate rites and ceremonies are performed, for example, for the cutting and transport of cedar logs used for the main shrines, the preparation of the site, and the actual erection of the shrines.

The actual transfer of the deities occurs during an evening in October. As the deity departs the old shrine, an envoy from the emperor announces the departure. Simultaneously, the emperor (who is located at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo)

faces toward Ise and performs an additional ritual. Upon arriving at the new shrine, the newly enshrined deity will receive the first offering of sacred food.

The most recent renewal was in 1993, and the next is scheduled for 2013.

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See also Iwashimizu Matsuri; Kanmiso-sai; Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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Shinran Shonin, Birthday of

Shinran Shonin (1173–1263) was the founder of the Japanese Jodo Shinshu tradition, the largest branch of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Pure Land Buddhism seeks to facilitate the salvation of its members through the simple practice of calling upon the name of Amitabha Buddha (known as Amida Buddha in Japan).

Shinran became a Tendai Buddhist monk in 1181 and lived for some 20 years at their monastic complex on Mount Hiei near Kyoto. He then left Mount Hiei somewhat disenchanted with the monastic life and excited by the relatively new teachings being offered by Honen (1133–1212), who founded the first of the Japanese Pure Land sects, the Jodo-shu. He studied with Honen from 1201 to 1207. The new teachings discounted the necessity for long years of study and practice so characteristic of the monastic life.

The Jodo-shu movement ran into trouble when some followers of Honene violated the prohibition on proselytizing. Both Honen and Shinran were exiled and Shinran lost his status as a monk. Shinran assumed the lay name Fuji'i Yoshizane, but went even further and married. He and his wife Eshinni had six children. In 1214, Shinran and his family settled in Hitachi (present-day Ibaraki prefecture) and built a large following and created Pure Land meeting centers termed *dojos*. In 1234, Shinran turned the *dojos* over to his followers and returned to Kyoto with his family.

Shinran would spend much of the rest of his life putting his understanding of Pure Land teachings into writing. He advocated the centrality of *shinjin*, true or sincere faith, Spiritual release comes when the devotee perceives his or her inadequacies and surrenders to the absolute Other Power (*tariki*) of Amida Buddha, whose compassion is the source of the power that makes salvation possible. Even

shinjin or faith, the prime condition for birth in the Pure Land, emerges as a gift. The sincere utterance of the *nembutsu*, the mantra calling upon Amida Buddha's name, is ultimately an invocation of gratitude and joy for Amida's compassion.

Jodo Shinshu Buddhists commemorate Shinran's birthday with a special Shinran Shonin (Gotan-E) Day worship service at temples worldwide on or near May 1, his birthday and his death with a Ho-On-Ko service, to remember and express gratitude for Shinran's life and work on or near January 16.

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See also Eshinni-Kakushinni Memorial.

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■ Shinto

Shinto (the Divine Way), the traditional religion of Japan, is today represented by a spectrum of religious groups in the land of its birth, the largest segment of the movement being Shrine Shinto, which finds embodiment in the thousands of public shrines that dot the landscape. Shrine Shinto was the state religion of Japan in the decades prior to World War II. Sect Shinto designated the 13 Shinto organizations (Kurozumikyo, Shinto Shuseiha, Izumo Oyashirokyo, Fusokyo, Jikkokyo, Shinshukyo, Shinto Taiseikyo, Ontaki-Kyo, Shintotaikyo, Misogikyo, Shinrikyo, Tenrikyo, and Konkyoko) recognized by the government during that period. In addition, there are more than 100 new Japanese religions that draw primarily on Shinto themes, some founded before 1945 and suppressed by the government, and others founded after 1945.

Early in Japan's history, numerous extended family groups (clans) developed, each of which developed religious practices largely tied to its land. There was no central political structure or unified culture. By the third century CE, an agriculturally based religion had become prominent, and over the next centuries, Japan would come together as a nation around the prominent Yamato clan (the source of the later imperial family). During this formative period, two of what would become leading Shinto shrines, Ise and Izumo, were created.

Crucial to the creation of a national Shinto religion (which incorporated the many local variations) was the introduction of Confucianism and its emphasis on ethics and



Shinto priests perform the *Tsukinami-sai* ritual at the Ise Shrine in Japan. (AP/Wide World Photos)

social order, the spread of the cosmology that divided the world into ying-yang polarities, and later the arrival of Buddhism. Each challenged the elite elements of Japan to create a uniquely Japanese faith comparable to that of neighboring states. One result was the compilation of the *Kojiki* (712 CE) and *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE), the two sacred texts of Shinto that describe the overarching myth out of which the many local cults would operate.

Shinto views the world as alive with divinity. The term *kami* refers to the many deities of heaven and earth, who may include among them some human beings and an array of natural objects (birds, plants, and natural features). Anything above the ordinary or that might awaken a sense of awe or mystery in the human mind may be listed as a *kami*, including the succession of emperors who have led the country.

Although *kami* of local significance are acknowledged at different shrines, some *kami* gained significance as part of the national myth of Japan's origin. The deities Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-Kami (Kami Master of the Center of Heaven), Taka-mi-musubi-no-Kami (High Sacred Creating Kami), and Kami-masubi (Sacred Creating Kami) are seen as the primordial deities who were present when nothing but the primal chaos existed. They were responsible for the formation of the earth and the deities who were later to create Japan and its people.

The High Kami in heaven sent the primal parents—Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female). Their interaction gave birth to numerous islands and other deities. Then Izanami was burned as the fire-god was given birth. She descended into the underworld, where she was trapped after eating of its food. In his attempts to free Izanami, Izanagi bathed in the ocean as a cleansing act. His ablutions also resulted in the appearance of Amaterasu, the goddess who is seen as the ancestress of the Japanese imperial family. While at a festival, another *kami* held up a mirror for Amaterasu to gaze upon herself. She would later give this mirror to her grandson, who was sent from heaven to establish the Japanese royal lineage. The mirror is now said to be residing hidden in the Ise shrine.

Shinto has an essential communal element, and much of its activity occurs in the many shrines that are found throughout Japan. The shrines, abodes of the kami, are generally located in spots of particular natural beauty or some noteworthy geographical feature. The site itself is marked off with a fence and the entrance with the distinctive gate (*torii*) to which a sacred rope (*shimenawa*) is attached. At the shrine, the kami are invoked on a cycle that follows the agricultural seasons and that affirms the myth of national origins. Many shrines are located at the foot of a mountain, which has the effect of marking the land of death and renewal (the mountain) from the plains, the land of life and activity. Others may be found at the point where two streams merge.

Common elements in Shinto rituals are the offering of foods, which in turn has had a profound influence on the Japanese diet, and purification, harkening back to the baths taken by Izanagi in his attempts to free his wife from the underworld. Food offerings may be classified by type (animal, vegetable, fish), style of preparation (raw or cooked), mode of offering, or whether it is to be viewed by the deities or eaten by them. Frequently the offered food becomes part of a banquet consumed later by the worshippers.

Purification rites have been developed in response to a variety of life's setbacks, from the sickness and death of a loved one to natural calamities and national disasters. They came to include reactions to forms of ritual impurity (from menstruation to sexual activity) and to symbolize the hope of renewal.

After 538 CE, Shinto developed in dialogue with Buddhism, the latter becoming an increasing part of Japanese life. Shinto and Buddhist temples were often constructed adjacent to each other, and they found a common ground in their esoteric element. Buddhists came to accept Shinto as a lesser form of itself, and locally, syncretistic Buddhist/Shinto cults developed that centered on specific shrines and local deities. Shugendo became one of the more interesting new religions drawing deeply from both Buddhist and Shinto sources.

Shinto experienced a revival in the 15th century after many shrines were destroyed in the Onin War (1467–1477). Out of the ashes emerged Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511), who dedicated his life to their reconstruction (especially those most associated with his prominent family), the return of Shinto supremacy in the land, and the reestablishment of imperial authority. He recast Shintoism as the original faith and the source of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. He expounded a new theology built around an exoteric teaching (as found in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*) and esoteric teachings that he claimed had been revealed by deities to his family (resulting in additional scriptural texts). Kanetomo became the leading figure in Shintoism, and his school would dominate the religion during the next centuries.

The work of Kanetomo and his successors would during the Edo period (1600–1868) lead to a shift in Shinto away from a primary dialogue with Buddhism to one with Confucianism. At the same time, a new scholarly movement, called *kokugaku*

(National Learning), attempted to redefine Japanese tradition and self-identity. Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), who led the new trend, emphasized the immanence of the Absolute as the divine within the inner life of the individual, the divine life expressed in ethical behavior, and, most important for Japan's future, the primary manifestation of divine virtue in the imperial government. During the Edo period, especially in the writings of Yoshikawa Koretari (1616–1694), the deity Kuninoto-kotachi no Mikoto, identified with the primal chaos, emerged as the central figure in the Shinto pantheon.

The continued development of Shinto in the 18th century set the stage for major developments in the 19th century. The variety of Shinto groups, later to constitute Sect Shinto, began to emerge. Most of these new groups were the result of the activity of a creative founder who was also responsible for the composing or receiving by revelation of a distinctive new scripture. These groups were later classified by the major themes they developed. Some emphasized attachment to traditional texts (*Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*), Confucian ethical principles, or purification rituals. The Fuji and Ontake sects emphasized the long-standing worship at sacred mountains. Spiritual healing, utilizing Shinto rituals, became the center of Tenrikyo and Konkokyo.

A new era for Shinto came in 1868 with the emergence of the Meiji government. The new government brought to the fore a form of Shinto usually referred to as State Shinto. It combined the thought of Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) with the cult that had grown up around the imperial family. Atsutane had been an effective propagandist of the return of Japan to imperial rule and the establishment of Shinto as the sole religion of the land. State Shinto propagated the belief in the divinity of the emperor and sanctified Japan's national political policies. It proposed as its idea *saisei itchi*, the unity of religion and government. Students of Atsutane were recruited to head a revived Office of Shinto Worship, whose initial mandate was the separation of Shinto from Buddhism and Christianity. As a result, Shinto shrines were stripped of all Buddhist and Christian symbols, and the Imperial Palace was denuded of the heretofore-dominant Buddhist altars and symbols.

In the 1870s, step by step, the government asserted its authority over the Shinto shrines and leadership. The Agency for Spiritual Guidance was given authority over all Shinto priests and designated their place of appointment. The national rituals to be performed at each shrine were also prescribed. The emperor was declared sacred and inviolable in 1889, and, in 1900, Shinto's special place was reemphasized by its being placed under the Bureau of Shrines in the Home Ministry, while Buddhism and Christianity were relegated to a separate Bureau of Religion in the Ministry of Education. In the meantime, Sect Shinto had an intermediary position. The sects were treated much like Buddhism and Christianity, being seen as private religious organizations under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Religion. Most important, they were allowed neither to create shrines nor to

copy shrine architecture in their worship centers, including the use of a torii as a gateway entrance.

Increasingly, Shinto was seen as an arm of the state. In 1911, it ordered all schools (including private religious schools) to take their pupils to shrines for nationally directed ritual events. In 1932, a Catholic school refused to comply with the regulation on grounds of religious freedom. Students at one Catholic school had been asked to visit a shrine particularly associated with Japan's military history. As a result of the protest, the government declared the shrines "nonreligious" sites whose task was to foster national loyalty. Shinto was thus redefined in such a way as to be compatible with any particular religious affiliation; the inclusion of Shinto ritual into both private and public life became a sign of loyalty as Japan went to war. Amulets from the Ise shrine became ubiquitous.

The loss in World War II affected Shinto most of all. The coming of religious freedom gave Sect Shinto a new life, and several sects emerged as popular movements whose adherents numbered into the tens of thousands. Then, on December 15, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) issued the "Shinto Directive," which ordered the separation of State Shinto from the government. Most important, the government was to end its support of the shrines. This mandate was embodied in the Constitution of 1947.

In the late 1940s, State Shinto evolved into what is today known as Shrine (*jinja*) Shinto. The formerly government-supported shrines were reorganized into a private religious corporation, the Association of Shinto Shrines, with which the great majority of shrines affiliated. There were more than 100,000 such shrines in 1945. By the beginning of the 1980s, some 79,000 shrines were maintained as part of the new system of voluntary support. Two seminaries, one at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo and the other at Kogakukan University in Ise, train Shinto priests. The association represents Shinto in various interfaith activities, including the World Conference on Religion and Peace. It also accepts women into the priesthood.

In spite of the proliferation of Shinto sects, the association includes the majority of the two million to three million Japanese who identify themselves as Shintoists, the number of whom is somewhat difficult to assess, as many people carry dual affiliations, a continuing result of Meiji Era practices. Support for Shinto in Japan pales next to that for Buddhism, which now commands the allegiance of more than half the population. The special Shinto of the Imperial House (*koshitsu*) also survives in a variety of practices associated with the emperor and his family, the shrines at the royal palace, and the Grand Shrine at Ise. The most important rite is Niinamesai, the annual offering of the first fruits of the grain harvest that includes thanksgiving to the deities for their blessing and a sharing of the food with the deities, especially Amaterasu.

The Grand Shrine at Ise, now a popular tourist attraction, includes two shrines. One is dedicated to Amaterasu and, as the shrine of the legendary ancestress of the

emperor, has a special relationship to the imperial family. Traditionally, the emperors would make reports to the goddess at the shrine, which was believed to hold the fabled mirror she had passed to her grandson. A second shrine is dedicated to Toyouke, the goddess of food. Every 20 years, new shrines replicating the old ones are erected. Upon their completion, as part of a ceremony of renewal, the ritual objects in the old shrines are transferred to the new ones, and the old shrines are then completely dismantled.

Shinto, as the religion of the Japanese people, has been largely confined to that country. However, early in the 20th century, it was established among Japanese immigrants in Hawaii. Although largely suppressed during World War II, it slowly revived after the war as questions of the loyalties of Japanese Americans were resolved. Shinto has subsequently appeared, in small numbers, in diaspora communities in Canada and South America.

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See also Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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Shinto—Cycle of Holidays

Shinto is the tradition indigenous religion of Japan, and it was present as a set of local ethno-linguistic religions as Japan emerged out of prehistory into the historical era and written records began to appear. As the islands that make up Japan were united under one ruler, Shinto became identified with the Japanese state and people. It faced several challenges with the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth and seventh centuries from Korea and China and the years of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868), when Buddhism was favored over Shinto. Shinto came back with a vengeance with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, but suffered significantly with Japan's defeat at the end of World War II and the arrival of religious freedom.

Christianity also posed a challenge to Shinto, but not in the way it did to Buddhism. During its initial period of growth in the 16th century, it was used to balance the power between rival Buddhist and Shinto rivals, but after the union of the country under Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the shoguns moved against Christianity. It would not again become a real factor until the 19th century, after the opening of the country to foreign trade.

The Meiji Restoration again placed Shinto at the center of Japanese culture and politics but also brought some important changes, and Japan continued to develop relationships to the outside world. In 1873, the Meiji government allowed the introduction of the Western Gregorian calendar, with its year running from January 1 through December 31, into Japan, although a system of numbering years tied to the reign of the emperor was popularly utilized. Previously, Japan had used a lunar-solar calendar based on the Chinese calendar. Then in 1884, Japan attended the International Meridian Conference held in Washington, D.C., that set the line north and south through Greenwich, England, as the Prime Meridian for the world. That meeting also confirmed the 180-degree meridian (with its several variations) as the International Date Line, important for the growing international shipping market, and set the beginning of the day at midnight. Japan has continued to cooperate with the scientific development of the calendar that has led to the current Common Era calendar now used by almost all governments.

The pervasive adoption of the Common Era calendar has meant that the continued use of other calendars has been primarily by religious communities. The relatively early adoption of the Western calendar by Japan, even as Shinto was attempting to reestablish itself as the national religion of Japan, led to the first steps of the adoption of the Common Era calendar for the holding of Shinto holidays. That move was spurred by the changes at the end of World War II and the growing secularization of Japan. It was assisted by the local nature of many of Shinto holiday festivals, which were always set locally and not coordinated as a national event throughout the country. Many of the local festivals still set their dates by the traditional Japanese calendar, while an equally large number now used the Common Era calendar.

Japan has been the home to numerous local festivals, called *matsuris*, and while any given festival may be celebrated on the same day year after year, it may vary considerably from other similar festivals celebrated elsewhere across the country. This pattern is particularly visible in the seasonal festivals celebrating the spring planting, summer growing, and fall harvest seasons. Most communities hold a festival to mark the beginning of the agricultural year, to hold back threats to their maturing crops, and to give thanks for the harvest, but these would vary from city to city and according to the length of the growing season (which is quite short in the northern parts of the country). In the last half of the 20th century, the business community has thrown its support behind many *matsuris*, transforming them into significant local tourist attractions. For believers, such festivals become an

opportunity for the exercise of their faith, while for the majority, the celebration goes forward with no mention of the religious origins and underpinning.

The Shinto year begins on January 1, with New Year's Day celebrations. New Year's Day is a national holiday in Japan, and for Shinto believers, it is a day to pray for individual health and happiness. The changing calendar means that New Year's will be celebrated at different times by different people. The old-calendar New Year's Day coincided with the Chinese New Year (February–March) and continues as the Setsubun (season-changing) holiday. A setsubun day marks all the season changes; the new year was usually said to begin with the arrival of spring, which in China was in February. Many still observe Setsubun, now set on the solar calendar as February 3, while a lesser lunar New Year's celebration, Koshogatsu, comes in mid-January.

The January 1 New Year's celebration in Japan will continue for several days, spurred in part by the celebration of Genshi-sai on January 3. Genshi-sai proclaims the divine origins of the Japanese imperial family, believed to be derived from Ninigi-no-mikoto, grandson of Amaterasu Omikami. In Japanese/Shinto thought, Amaterasu is the child of Izanagi-no-Mikoto and Izanami-no-Mikoto (the details vary), and she then sent her grandson Ninigi-no-Mikoto to bring rice to human-kind. Ninigi would become the great-grandfather of Emperor Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan.

The Imperial House of Japan ruled the country through the centuries, and even in the days of the Shogunate, continued as the symbolic head of the country until restored to real power in 1868. Following World War II, the emperor was forced to renounce his status as a divine ruler, the idea (narrowly defined) that he is “divinity in human form,” and/or the idea that the Japanese people were superior to other races. The wording of the renunciation left open the question of belief that the emperor and/or the Japanese people are ultimately the descendants of the gods, specifically Amaterasu. The emperor remains in office as the symbol of the Japanese state and the unity of the Japanese people, and various relatives continue to perform a spectrum of ceremonial, social, and specifically religious duties. The place of the emperor in the divine lineage, now in ways that do not contradict the provisions of the Constitution, are affirmed in the ritual of Genshi-sai, which is carried out most importantly at the major site long identified with imperial power at the Ise (near Ise City) and the several shrines in Kyoto.

The high priest(ess) of Ise Shrine is a member of the Japanese imperial family. In 965, the emperor Murakami (926–967) ordered that henceforth, messengers from the imperial throne would be sent to 16 selected shrines around the country to bring reports of important events to Japan's guardian deities (*kami*). Those 16, along with 5 additional shrines added to the list, remain the most important Shinto shrines in the country relative to the continuing relationship between Shinto and the country and the imperial family. Soon after Gensei-sai, these shrines will be the primary sites for the holding of the Shōwa-Tenno-sai-yohai ceremony

(January 7), which remembers the death of the Shōwa emperor Horohito (r. 1926–1989).

Throughout the year, especially at Ise Jinju and the other shrines most tied to the emperor, a series of rites are performed annually that reaffirm the emperor's role in the life of the nation and the familial ties with Amaterasu. Literally hundreds of ceremonies are held through the year, though a few emerge as most important. The more important include:

January 11: Kenkokukinen-sai, celebration of the foundation of the nation.

March 21: Shunki-koreisai-yohai, ceremony remembering the imperial ancestors.

April 3: Jinmu Tenno-sai-yohai, anniversary of the passing of Emperor Jinmu.

May 1: Kanmiso-hoshoku-hajime-sai, ceremony for weaving the sacred silk and the sacred hemp.

May 13: Kanmiso-hoshoku-chinsha-sai, celebration of thanksgiving for the completion of weaving the sacred silk and sacred hemp.

May 14: Kanmiso-sai, offering of the sacred silk and hemp to become the clothing for Amaterasu.

October 1, 13, and 14: The Kanmiso ceremonies of May are repeated.

In addition to the imperial holidays, there are an additional set of celebrations to Amaterasu related to food production. The first of the year occurs on January 11, and is termed Ichigatsu-juichinichi-mike, the purpose being to offer sacred food to Amaterasu (and the other deities). This ceremony leads to the most important spring celebration of Kinen-sai (February 17–23), the spring festival at which prayers are given for a plentiful harvest. Two ceremonies are held, one focused on food, the other on clothing materials. People traditionally dressed in clothing made from silk (the emperor and nobility) and hemp (the great majority of the people). Kinen-sai initiated a set of ceremonies around the weaving of cloth, especially the emperor silk.

Kinen-sai would be reflected across Japan in a number of local spring festivals, with some, such as the one at Takayama, becoming internationally famous. The underlying purpose of all the spring festivals was to pray for the crops that were being planted so that they would take root and eventually produce an abundant harvest. In the modern world, they become an extension of the New Year's celebration in which people see good fortune through the coming year. This emphasis is also reflected in the Shinto celebration of the spring equinox on March 21. Misono-sai is a ceremony is held at Ise Jingu, specifically again to pray for a plentiful harvest.

The transition to the summer season is reflected in the May 14 ceremony of Kazahinomi-sai, at which prayers are offered for good weather and sufficient rain

for the all-important rice crop. It also noted that the popular alcoholic drink sake is also made from rice. This ceremony is repeated on August 4, and is reflected in the many summer festivals such as the Aizen Summer Matsuri, at which prayers are given to stave off any disasters that might negatively affect the crops in the field by weather, insects, or disease. The prosperity of the nation as a whole was dependent on the food being raised, symbolized by rice.

Ritual concern for the harvest reaches a climax in October with the celebration of Kanname-sai, at which the first fruits from the rice harvest are offered to Amaterasu. The emperor personally harvests the initial plants and sends them via an imperial envoy to Ise, where they will be offered as part of the ceremony. He also sends samples of silk for the ceremony. This ceremony also coincides with the accepted date of Amaterasu's original enshrinement ceremony at Ise jinju two millennia ago, and has become the single most important ceremony of the year at the shrine.

Kanname-sai is conducted in three steps. The first, the Yukino-omike ceremony, held in the evening, centers on the food offerings. The Hoheisai ceremony then focuses on the offerings of silk and other materials. The final phase is built around ceremonial court music and dance dedicated to all the enshrined kami. This last celebration is held in the evening following the Hoheisai ceremony. Kanname-sai, held over 10 days in October, initiates a series of fall thanksgiving celebrations across Japan that will celebrate the abundance of the harvest.

As the cycles of imperial and agricultural celebrations proceed, on the second Monday of the year, the first of the several coming-of-age ceremonies held in Japan occurs. Seijin no Hi, or Coming of Age Day, also an official holiday throughout Japan, celebrates the transition of teenagers to adulthood, which in Japan occurs when they reach their 20th birthday. It is followed by three widely observed events, to celebrate young boys (Kodomo ni Hi, or Children's Day, May 5) and girls (the Doll Festival, March 3) and the smaller children (aged three, five and seven, Shichi-Go-San or Children's Day, November 15).

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See also Aizen Summer Festival; Doll Festival; Kanmiso-sai; Kodomo no Hi; Koshogatsu; Seijin no Hi; Shikinensengu.

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Shivaratri. See Mahashivaratri

Shravava Mela

The month of Shravana on the Hindu calendar (July–August on the Common Era calendar) is sacred to the deity Shiva. It is believed that it was during this month that the churning of the Ocean of Milk, one of the most famous stories in Hindu thought, occurred during this month. During the churning, some poison was released, and to save humankind from its effects, Shiva drank the poison.

One place where Shiva's saving act is remembered is the Shiva Temple at Deogharh in Jharkhand. During Shrevana, thousands of pilgrims arrive at this temple from across India and neighboring Nepal. Those who wish to make the pilgrimage will first come to Sultanganj, a town on the Ganges River in the state of Bihar. Sultanganj is notable as being located at the only point on the river where it briefly turns and flows north. It is also the location of a monthlong fair during the holy month, the Shravava Mela. Pilgrims to the Shiva Temple will begin their trek with a visit to the fair.

While in Sultanganj, pilgrims will also collect water from the river, which they will carry to the Deoghar Temple. The water will be used to bath the Shiva lingam (a phallic symbol of Shiva) on display there. The pilgrims, called Kanwarias, believe this action will assist in removing ignorance and fulfilling their desires.

In Hindu thought, Mondays are sacred to Shiva, and hence, that day is the heaviest in the month for pilgrims arriving at the temple. Believers also will fast all day on Monday.

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See also Amarnath Yatra; Kumbha Mela; Mahashivaratri.

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Shrove Monday See Mardi Gras

Shrove Tuesday. See Mardi Gras

Shuni-e (Omizutori)

The Shuni-e (or “Second-Month Service”) is a Japanese Buddhist ceremony devoted to the bodhisattva Guan Yin (Avalokitesvara), known in Japan as Kannon. It is a two-week celebration held in the second month of the traditional lunar calendar (which falls in February or March on the Common Era calendar) in a few select temples especially dedicated to Kannon, of which there are many in Japan. The best-known celebration is at the old temple at Nara, Todai-ji.

The Todai-ji Shuni-e originated in the early years of Buddhism’s presence in Japan, being traced the eighth century and the building of Todai-ji, begun in 745 at the behest of the emperor Shomu (701–756), a staunch Buddhist. Shortly after its completion, however, the emperor fell ill, and his wife, the empress Kōmyō, requested Jitchū, a prominent Kegon monk at Todai-ji, to create a new ritual for his benefit. In response, he developed the Shuni-e ceremony focused upon devotion to and confession before Bodhisattva Kannon. According to the story, the ritual reproduces one that Jitchū experienced in a heavenly vision. It has subsequently remained an annual event since its first observance in 752. Since 772, the ritual has been held at Nigatsu-dō, a hall constructed especially for the conducting of the ritual. Nigatsu-dō is located just east of the hall where the Great Buddha of Todai-ji is housed.

The Shuni-e ritual, which the public may not attend, is conducted by a small group of monks who gather in Nigatsu-dō (or its equivalent in other temples) six times during each 24-hour period. The sessions at which prayers are offered, confessions made, and the name of Kannon invoked (using the Eleven-Faced Avalokitesvara Heart Dharani Sutra), vary in length, though the longest is the late evening session, which lasts three hours.

Although not allowed inside the hall, believers will gather around the hall where the ritual sessions are occurring each evening for a nightly fire ceremony. Each night, a small group of believers are selected to carry torches and run along the balcony of Nigatsu-dō, allowing sparks from the torches to be showered on the gathered assembly. At the same time, the monks will be chanting, performing ritual circumambulation of the hall, and waving swords in the air to ward off evil spirits.

The most important day of Shuni-e is the last. Following the fire ceremony that evening, the monks will retire to a place underneath the ritual hall, where a well is located. Legend suggests that on this day alone, water will spring forth from it, and the monks gather the water in two pots. One pot contains some water from the previous year, and the other water from all previous observances of Shuni-e. The water is then offered to Kannon and subsequently to the general public (which usually occurs around 2:00 a.m.). The water is believed to have miraculous powers.

This water ceremony is known as Omizutori, a name that has come to be used synonymously with Shuni-e as the name of the whole two-week activity. After

the ceremony, the remaining water in the two pots is preserved for the following year's celebration.

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See also Guan Yin, Renunciation of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Jizo Bon.

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Shunki-Korei-Sai. See Higan

Siddha Day (November 24)

Sri Aurobindo (Aravinda Akroyd Ghose, 1872–1950) was an important early-20th-century Indian spiritual teacher who operated from Pondicherry, on India's eastern coast. Having received a good education, Ghose threw himself into the fight for Indian independence, which took much of his time through the first decade of the 20th century. His activity led to his arrest on several occasions. Simultaneously, he had been practicing meditation and yoga, and in 1907, he had a significant experience of inner illumination. During a later period (1909–1910), he had had repeated mystical encounters. In 1910, he dropped his political work to concentrate on his spiritual vision.

He moved to Pondicherry and there he continued his yoga and meditation disciplines, and was joined his work by the person who was to share his vision and eventually become his coworker and successor, Mirra Richard, known more popularly as just the Mother.

On November 24, 1926, the efforts of his spiritual disciplines culminated in and intense experience now remembered as the Siddha event, which he described as the descent of the divine consciousness into the physical. It would later be described as the descent of the Higher Power symbolic of the victory of their mission, that is the Delight consciousness (symbolized by the deity Krishna) in the Overmind (the highest divine realm) descended on this day into the physical, rendering possible the descent of the Supermind into Matter.

Following this event, Aurobindo largely retired from contact with the world. From that point, he communicated to his growing following through the Mother, and as he worked on the spiritual planes, she led in the building of his movement internationally. Over the next years of their lives, the pair offered darshan

(opportunities for the ashram members to see them and receive a personal blessing) a few times each year. One of these occasions was the anniversary of the Siddhi event. The annual Siddhi darshan was continued by the Mother in the years following Aurobindo's death. Since her death, the date has become a commemoration date at the ashram for Aurobindo's followers, many coming from around the world to remember their spiritual teachers.

On this day, the living quarters of Aurobindo and the Mother will be opened for viewing by their disciples, and special programming will be offered—some informational and some celebrative. Siddha Day is also the anniversary of the founding of the ashram.

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See also Aurobindo, Birth Anniversary of Sri; Mother, Birthday of the.

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Sigd

The Sigd is an ancient holiday of Ethiopian Jews (Beta Yisrael) that highlighted their desire to move to the Land of Israel and be reunited with their fellow believers. It was a time to fast, repent, and beseech God concerning their return to Jerusalem. The ritual called those in attendance of the renewal of the covenant by Ezra in the sixth century BCE, when the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. The Book of Nehemiah (9:1–3) states:

And on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel assembled with fasting and with sackcloth and earth on them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers . . . and read the Torah . . . and prostrated themselves.

The Sigd is held annually on the 29th day of the Hebrew month of Heshvan, 50 days after Yom Kippur. Jewish leaders in Ethiopia tied the events recounted in Nehemiah that they are emulating to the harvest season, which differs in Ethiopia. Thus, the dating of the Sigd was changed to accommodate the local growing season.

Prior to the immigration of most Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the last generation, the community fasted on the Sigd. In the morning hours, the *kaisim* (spiritual leaders) carried the Orit (the Torah written in Ge'ez) to a nearby mountain with the faithful in a procession behind them. Like Moses, they ascended the mountain. Once at the top, the *kaisim* would chant special holiday prayers (based on Ezra's prayer), and read passages from the Bible, including the one from Nehemiah concerning the first Sigd. The prayers concern the welfare of the Jewish community as a whole, the rebuilding of the Temple, and for the return of the entire Jewish people to Israel. After the return down the mountain, the Orit is returned to its normal resting place, followed by a meal, with music and dance. A special bread, the Dabu, is also served. The gathering lasts all night, and in the morning, breakfast is served before everyone returned to their homes.

The Sigd celebration has been continued in Israel, with many non-Ethiopian Jews joining the festivities. Instead of going up a mountain, the community visits Jerusalem for a mass meeting at De Haas Promenade in Armon Hanatziv and the Western Wall (of the old temple). The *kaisim* lead various processions in different parts of the city, and the faithful fast until the meal and the serving of the Dabu bread.

Most Ethiopian Jews regard themselves as the descendants of the lost tribe of Dan. Others suggest that they derive from Jewish immigrants from Egypt or Yemen. Still others hold to the notion that they date from the meeting of the Jewish king Solomon and the Ethiopian queen of Sheba. In either case, they have been welcomed to Israel through the law of return and are being integrated into Israeli society.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Yom HaAatzmaut; Yom HaZikaron; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Silent Day. See Holy week

Simchat Torah. See Shemini Alzeret/Simchat Torah

Sivananda Saraswati, Birthday of Swami (September 8)

While birthdays are natural occasions for celebration, they pose some problems for many in the Hindu community. They view birth in human form in a somewhat negative occurrence by a soul trapped by karma in the cycle of reincarnation. The aim of the spiritual quest is to escape this life and the cycle of repeated return. In addition, to those who accept the renounced life, little reference is made to the period before becoming a sannyasin.

Exceptions to the view about birth in a human body comes in the cases of a deity who incarnates or an evolved human who returns to share their spirituality for the benefit of humanity in general. Their incarnation is a blessed event to be remembered and celebrated. Their life and death is an ephemeral affair and remain ever present to help souls find their way back to God. To members of the Divine Life Society, for example, holidays like Christmas or Janmashtami are occasions where believers celebrate the incarnation of a deity. It is in this spirit that they celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963), whom they consider an evolved soul of the highest order.

As a young man, the future swami started on a medical career, which was cut short by the death of his father and his having to assume responsibility for his young siblings. After his responsibilities were fulfilled, he renounced his secular life and took the sannyasin vows. In 1924, he moved to Rishikesh, and emerged as a master of meditation and yoga. As disciples gathered around him, he founded the Divine Life Society and the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy. He authored literally hundreds of books and built an international network. Following his death in 1963, a number of his students created new networks of yoga centers throughout the West to perpetuate his teachings.

Sivananda was buried at the academy site in Rishikesh, now a shrine to his memory. His birthday is commemorated throughout the world at the many centers in his lineage, though the largest celebration is a Rishikesh where the main academy's temple and the Sivanada shrine will be decorated with candles and flowers. The commemoration will begin early in the morning and last all day with pujas, music, chanting, and inspirational talks on the spirituality and accomplishments of Sivananda. The sandals he wore have been kept as a relic, and these are now used as a focus for veneration. Those who remain that remember Sivanada will share their personal experiences of him.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Janmashtami; Satchidananda, Birthday of Swami.

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Skanda Shashti

Saivite Hindus, especially among Tamils, consider shashti (the sixth day after the new or full moon) sacred to Murugan, much as Vaishnavas considered the 11th



Young boys prepare to celebrate Skanda Shashti. Often a young, unmarried male student is invited to dinner and given gifts as a representative of Lord Skanda. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

day (ekadashi) sacred to Vishnu. In Saivite thought, Murugan, also known as Subrahmanya, is the son of Shiva. The sixth day of the waxing moon in the month of Kartika is celebrated as Shanda Shastri by Saivites, Skanda being another of Murugan's names.

Lord Murugan is considered as a symbol of a variety of virtues such as compassion, benevolence, and valor. He commands an army of demigods (Devas) and was born to destroy the demons and protect the demigods. Skanda Shashti celebrates Lord Murugan's destruction of the demon Sura Padman, which occurred at Tiruchendur, one among the six major Saivite sacred sites in Tamil Nadu. In the battle, using a sphere given him by his mother Parvati, Murugan split the demon (who has assumed the form of a tree) into two halves. Murugan then granted each half of the defeated demon a boon. As a result, the halves were transformed into the peacock (who became Murugan's mount) and the rooster, pictured on the flag of his army.

Skanda Shashti is a six-day fast dedicated to Lord Murugan that immediately follows Diwali, the single most celebrated holiday among Hindus worldwide, though many Tamils will only fast on the shashti day. The six days are the first days of the Hindu month of Kartika (October–November on the Common Era calendar) also known as the month of Aippasi on the Tamil calendar. The fast means avoiding non-vegetarian food and, in its more severe form, avoiding the strong seasoning provided by onion and garlic. Some will consume only one meal in 24 hours, with that meal being at either noon or in the evening following a visit to the local temple.

Skanda Shasti is celebrated across Tamil Nadu and nearby Sri Lanka and throughout the Tamil diaspora in places such as Singapore, Malaysia, Guyana, Trinidad, and the United States. One American Hindu group, the Saiva Siddhanta Church, originally known as the Subramuniya Yoga Order, is dedicated to Lord Murugan. It will often include dramatic reenactments of Murugan's destruction of the demon, and climax on the day following with a reenactment of Murugan's visits with his consort Deivanai, commonly known as Tirukalyanam. The observant will end their fast on either the sixth day or with the celebration of the marriage on the seventh day.

Constance A. Jones

See also Diwali; Hala Shashti; Narasimha Jayanti; Surya Shashti; Thaipusam.

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Snan Yatra

Snan Yatra, a special bathing ceremony for Lord Jagannath (an incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu) takes place on the purnima (full moon) of the Indian month of Jyestha (May–June in the Common Era calendar). It commemorates the jayanti or appearance day (birthday) of Lord Jagannath.

The festival is held at the Jagannath temple in Puri, a coastal city in the state of Orissa in eastern India, best known as the site of the Rathayatra festival held several weeks later in which the statues of Lord Jagannath, his sister Subhadra, and his brother Balabhadra (or Balarama) are processed through the streets on the large carts that gave the word juggernaut to the English language. Vaishnava Hindus attribute the creation of the whole universe to Jagannath (Vishnu), and the bathing ceremony in Puri is duplicated in all other important temples in Orissa and among Vaishnava Hindus now scattered worldwide, including centers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in the West.

On the day before the full moon, the statues to be bathed are removed from their resting place in the Puri temple and processed *Snana Vedi* (or bathing *pandal*), an elevated, elaborately decorated platform near the temple that allows the gathered crowd to see what is occurring. The deity statues are covered with flowers. The deities are presented with incense and other sweet-smelling substances and entertained with music.

For the bath, water is ceremoniously brought from the *Suna Kua* (or golden well) in special covered containers made of copper and gold. Once in place, the

water is blessed by the priests by adding to it a variety of substances including turmeric, rice, flowers, perfumes, and medicinal herbs. The actual bathing ceremony begins in the morning hours of the purnima. The vessels of holy water are brought by procession to the Snana Vedi.

It being the hottest time of the year in Orissa, the liquids that are now poured over the statues are thought of as being offered to cool the lord's transcendental body. The practical effect of the bath is that the traditional paints used to color the statues tend to be washed away. To deal with this "embarrassing" moment, the statues are redressed and an elephant mask is placed so as to cover their face. For what is now called the Hati Vesha festival, Lord Jagannatha and Lord Balarama wear an elephant dress, and Lady Subhadra a lotus flower costume. The story is told that the elephant mask was occasioned by the visit of a Ganesh scholar to Orissa. He refused the invitation of the king to visit the Snan Yatra event since he worshipped only Ganesh (the elephant-headed deity and son of Shiva) but, in wandering through the city, came upon the festival in any case. To his amazement, Lord Jagannath had assumed Ganesh's appearance just for him. Since that time, the mask has annually been placed on the Jagannath statue by his devotees.

Immediately after the Snan Yatra festivities, the deities are returned to the Puri temple and the daily routine at the temple suspended for the next two weeks. No one is allowed to view the deities. During this time, the statues are repainted and restored to the condition devotees expect when offering them worship. On the 16th day after the Snan Yatra, the statues are deemed ready to hold darshan (allow the public to view their divine countenance). This darshan event is termed Netrotsava (festival for the eyes) or Nava Yauvanotsava (festival of the ever new youth). To participate in this event is believed to wash away the devotee's sins. The statues are also now considered ready to participate in the even-larger festival of Rathayatra.

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See also Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord; Ganga Dussehra; Kartika Snan; Magha Purnima; Mauni Amavasya; Parshurama Jayanti; Ratha Yatra.

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Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the (January 1)

In 1751, Joseph Emmanuel, the king of Portugal, requested a new celebration for the Portuguese branch of the Roman Catholic Church—a feast for the Motherhood of Mary. Pope Benedict XIV (r. 1740–1758) not only approved the idea but wrote the original liturgy for the day. Its celebration was designated for October 11. Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) saw the connection of the celebration to the proclamation of Mary as Theotokos (Mother of God) by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and took the occasion of the 1,500th anniversary of the council’s action to make the feast universal throughout the church.

In 1969, in light of the decisions of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1969), a number of changes were made to the church’s liturgical calendar. Among the most significant changes related to Mary was the movement of the Feast of the Motherhood of Mary from October 11 to January 1, where it replaced the traditional Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus. Now known as the Solemnity of Mary, the holy Mother of God, Mariologists saw it as emphasizing the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. They see Mary as exalted above all angels and all humans and second only to her Son. Both historically and theologically, the assertion of her mission as the Mother of God is the foundation for the additional assertions of the Immaculate Conception, her perpetual virginity, and assumption into heaven.

To the celebration of Mary as the Mother of God, the post-1969 liturgy also celebrates her role as the Mother of the Church. This title of Mary, derived from its usage by Bishop Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397 CE), was inserted into a talk by Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) at the Second Vatican Council. His successor, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) subsequently elaborated upon the idea. This new title revived for Mary was seen by many as balancing the seeming denigration of Mariology as a separate field of theology by placing it as a subtopic in ecclesiology, the theology of the church.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Circumcision, Feast of the; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Most Holy Name of Mary, Feast of the.

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Songkran

Throughout Southeast Asia, the traditional New Year’s Day is somewhat related to the spring or vernal equinox, though it has drifted in several cases due to calendar

inaccuracies and the neglect of astrological recalculations. The several countries from Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka to Vietnam used a variation of the Buddhist calendar, a lunar calendar that began annually when the full moon arose in the astrological month of Taurus with regular readjustments to keep it in line with the solar year. Each country made the adjustments slightly differently, and thus the day of the celebrations began to differ slightly. The larger event being marked was the annual shift in weather, from the dry to the rainy season. Throughout the region, however, a common feature of the celebration was the dousing of friends, neighbors and passersby with water, and New Year's celebrations are often referred to as the water festival.

In Thailand, being thrust into the modern world changed the celebration significantly. Prior to 1888, the Thai New Year, called Songkran, was the functional New Year throughout the country. Then from 1888 to 1940, April 1 (on the Common Era calendar) became New Year's Day, with January 1 succeeding to the role in 1940. The traditional Thai New Year was transformed into a national holiday, and fixed as a three-day celebration on the Common Era calendar, April 13–15. Cambodia went through a similar process of adjusting its calendar to the Common Era and also now celebrates its traditional New Year's Days, known as Chol Chnam Thmey, beginning on April 13 or 14. In Myanmar, it is called Thingyan, and in Laos as Bpee Mai.

Common to many New Year's celebrations worldwide, as the date approaches, people began a time of general cleaning of their living quarters. The water used in washing homes, or ritually washing Buddhist statues, naturally grades into the water for soaking others, especially ones otherwise in a position of authority, all in good fun. Amid the fun, a certain sign of respect is shown by the addition of flowers and/or perfume fragrances to the water. The perfume is especially used in ritualized settings where the dousing with water becomes an anointing, a way of giving and receiving a blessing to and from Buddhist monks or one's elders. In some countries, young people will also wash the hair of elders in preparation for the larger celebration.

While New Year's is a widespread secular holiday, it has its religious aspect. In Laos, for example, sand brought to the Buddhist temples will be shaped into stupas (generally used for housing relics), decorated, and given to the monks. This practice grew out of a story of one of the country's former kings, King Kabinlaphom. It seems that following Kabinlaphom's death, his daughters placed his head in a cave, which they visited annually to perform a ritual asking for happiness for the Laotian people and good weather for the growing season. The sand stupas represent Phoukao Kailat, the mountain where the cave with the king's head was located. A similar related story is told in other countries.

Also, believers will bring many flowers to the temples to decorate the statues of the Buddha (most Southeast Asian temples having but one statue of Gautama Buddha as the focal point of their worship. In Chiang Mai, Thailand, there is a tradition of removing the statues of the Buddha from the city's monasteries and

carrying them around the city on floats in multiple processions. As a procession passes, watchers throw water on the statues, thus providing them with a ritual bath. Meanwhile, in Bangkok, the Phra Buddha Sihing, a well-known and revered image of the Buddha, is marched through the streets to the royal grounds (Sanam Luang), where it will rest for the celebration's duration.

For young boys, the beginning of the new year is an occasion to go through shinbyu ritual, in which they adopt the life of a monk for a short period of time in a monastic setting and the study of Buddhism (analogous to the catechism classes that prepare Christian children for their first communion). Most males in Southeast Asia have spent at least a few months as a monk during their youth.

Buddhists also judge their ethical behavior not just relative to humans, but to all sentient life. Thus, New Year's becomes a time to set animals free, and many small animals, such as birds or fish kept as pets, will be released.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Elephant Festival; New Year's Day; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Sophia, The Descent (September 8) and Assumption (August 15) of Holy

An initial appearance of the Sophia (Wisdom) occurs in the biblical Book of Proverbs, which says of her:

Does not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands; Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, At the coming in at the doors, she cries aloud: "Unto you, O men, I call; And my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand prudence; And, ye fools, be of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak excellent things; And the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall utter truth; And wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All

the words of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing crooked or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understands, And right to them that find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver; And knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; And all the things that may be desired are not to be compared unto it.” (Proverbs 8:1–11)

This passage from the Jewish Bible found a heightened meaning when Jewish culture encountered Greek culture in the new world created by the conquests of Alexander’s culture. Wisdom (Sophia in Greek) was a major concept in Greek thought, and in the learned world of ancient Alexandria, Jewish philosophy speculated on the idea of the divine Sophia as the revelation of God’s inward thought-world. This concept subsequent fed into the Gnosticism of the second century CE as represented, for example, in the teachings of Valentinus (c. 100–c. 160 CE), who had been trained at Alexandria.

In Gnostic interpretations, the Sophia resides in the invisible, but becomes the highest ruler over the visible universe, and thus the mediatrix between the higher and lower realms in the layered cosmos of Gnostic thought. Also, important in their thinking, Sophia is a she, and she is the mother. It was also envisioned that there had been a descent of Sophia from her spiritual home into the dark material world. As a feminine figure, Sophia is both analogous to the human soul and seen as a feminine aspect of the transcendent God.

Sophia appears in a number of Gnostic texts, including some of those known through the centuries such as the *Pistis Sophia*, and those lost and rediscovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi, Egypt. She has a slightly different role assigned by the authors of the different texts; however, in the contemporary revived Gnostic movement, Sophia’s role as a feminine aspect of God has come to the fore.

Some modern Gnostic groups, such as the California-based *Ecclesia Gnostica*, has responded positively to the concerns raised by the modern feminist movement and attempted to embody significant references to the divine feminine in its liturgies. In its annual liturgical calendar, the *Ecclesia Gnostica*, in particular, has assigned to Sophia the days normally assigned to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the annual calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. Through the 19th and 20th centuries, the Catholic Church has experienced a visible rise in interest in the role of the Virgin in human salvation and, in the midst of this revived interest, has defined several new dogmas, most notably that of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin. The former deals with the sinless birth of the Virgin, and the latter addresses her ascent into heaven without first having experienced bodily death.

The Catholic Church observes liturgically a set of significant events in the life of the Virgin, including: her Immaculate Conception (December 8), her Birth or Nativity (September 8), the announcement of her pregnancy with Jesus (March 23), her giving birth to Jesus (December 25) and her Assumption into heaven (August 15).

Corresponding to the Roman Catholic celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven, on August 15, the Ecclesia Gnostica celebrates the Assumption of the Holy Sophia into the Pleroma (the heavenly realm in Gnostic cosmology). It has developed this celebration from accounts in the various Gnostic writings, which it considers scripture of Sophia wandering out of heaven and getting lost in the lower realms. She sings praises to the Light, and is rescued by the Savior who aids her return to heaven. This story is related to the Gnostic analysis of the individual state of being cast out of the Fullness of Being to become differentiated egos. The Logos (the Word of God) also assists us to return to the state of Wholeness.

Corresponding to the Roman Catholic celebration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, on September 8, the Ecclesia Gnostica celebrates the Descent of the Holy Sophia. The Gnostic literature also tells how part of Sophia returns to her true home, while part of her comes to the lower regions to be with humanity, her children. She became humanity's consolation and the inspiration for love. The image of Sophia is a promise that humans are not left alone in the darkness, but have Sophia's abiding presence in their lives.

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See also Assumption of the Virgin; Christmas; Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical Year; Immaculate Conception, Feast of the; Nativity of Mary.

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Sorrows, Feast of Our Lady of (September 15)

As attention was focused on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the early Middle Ages, note was made of different moments in Mary's earthly life that were times of sorrow, to be born with patience. Her going through these moments, each mentioned in the New Testament, came to be seen as primary signs of her saintliness. Four of these moments related to her witnessing the events of the last week of Jesus's earthly life.

In 1239, five years after establishing what would become the Servite order, the seven founders of the order decided to make the seven sorrows the primary devotional format they would follow. As the order grew, the members popularized

devotion to Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows. This devotion came before a synod held at Cologne in 1413, called to deal with the Protestantizing followers of John Hus (c. 1369–1415) based in Prague. The synod proposed a feast day to honor Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows, with a focus on those sorrows related to the crucifixion, as a liturgical response to the Hussites who tended to abandon various devotional practices deemed to be unbiblical. It was to be held on the third Sunday after Easter. Over the next century, both the date and the number of sorrows commemorated varied significantly.

Initially, the feast was celebrated through southern Europe, but spread significantly in the wake of the Counter-Reformation in the late 16th century. In 1727, Benedict XIII (r. 1724–1730) placed the feast on the Roman Catholic Church's calendar. Besides the celebration of the Seven Sorrows on September 14, the Servites also hold a second like-feast day on June 9. The feast is especially popular in South America where September 15 is a day of devotional activity at the churches. In the United States, the focus of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother is provided by the Sorrowful Mother Shrine in Bellevue, Ohio.

Berthe Petit (1870–1943), a Belgian visionary and a Franciscan tertiary, who frequently reported apparitions of both Mary and Jesus, proposed a form of devotion to the Sorrows of Mary that combined recognition of the Sorrows with devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Immaculate Heart of Mary, Feast of the; Solemnity of Mary, Feast of the.

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Spring Dragon Festival

The dragon is a ubiquitous symbol throughout China and traditional Chinese lore. The dragon was seen as positive creature, or more precisely as an auspicious creature, and served as a symbol of the emperor. It is its association with water, as the bringer of rain, that the Spring Dragon Festival is held. It is based upon an ancient belief that on the second day of the second lunar month (generally in early March on the Common Era calendar), the dragon raises its head. In agricultural areas, it



Chinese young men perform the dragon dance during the Spring Dragon Festival in 2010.
(Donkeyru/Dreamstime.com)

was hoped that the dragon's action would lead to large barns being full and small ones overflowing.

A popular Taoist legend recounts the coming of Wu Zetian, a Tang dynasty queen to the throne. In his anger, the Jade Emperor ordered the four dragon gods to withhold the rain for three years. One dragon took pity and allowed it to rain. The Jade Emperor punished the dragon by hiding him away in a mountain for a thousand years, or until "golden beans give birth to flowers." The people went searching for the golden beans, which they discovered to be popping corn. When the Jade Emperor saw that the people had in fact met his conditions, he called the dragon back to heaven to oversee the rains for the growing season. Since this time, popped corn is one of the three foods most associated with the festival.

In addition to popped corn, Spring Dragon foods include noodles, symbolic of the dragon's lifting his head, and fry cakes, associated with the dragon's gallbladder, the gallbladder being associated with courage.

The Spring Dragon Festival was celebrated in northern China, where the spring rains (monsoon season) tended to start after the second day of the second lunar month.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Dragon Boat Festival.

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Spring Equinox (Thelema) (March 20–23)

To Thelemites, followers of the religion initially articulated by Aleister Crowley in 1904, the spring equinox has become one of the most important of holidays, and is celebrated for four days, March 20–23. First, it allows the members of this small magical religious community a means of identifying with the larger religious community, especially other Esotericists with whom they share common religious roots and who also celebrate the Equinox.

At the same time, Thelemites draw their own inspiration from the changing seasons and the rebirth of life in the Northern Hemisphere. It is seen as a time for individuals to cleanse their body and spirit and prepare for the rebirth. It is a time to celebrate the traditional spring fertility festival and to honor Oestre the fertility goddess and make magic for her fruitfulness. Oestre is ultimately the source of the association of the Christian spring festival (Easter) with both the rabbit and Easter eggs.

The spring equinox has added significance for Thelemites, for on March 20, 1904, Aleister Crowley was in Cairo, Egypt, and made an invocation to the ancient Egyptian deity Horus. The invocation would result several weeks later in the communication to Crowley of the Book of the Law, the sacred scripture of Thelema, dictated to him by the spiritual entity known as Aiwass. Crowley would go on to issue a substantial biannual periodical called the *Equinox* (1909–1913) in March and September of each year. The first issue appeared in March 1909 and publicly announced his new magical order, the Astrum Argentum.

At the equinox, the dull pace of winter is thrown off and a new rhythm to life begins. It becomes a time for spring cleaning of the inner self, one's sacred space (home altar/temple area), and one's inner psyche. Hope for changes springs eternal. The equinox is the beginning of the New Year for Thelemites.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Feast for the Three Days of the Writing of the Book of the Law; First Night of the Prophet and His Bride; Spring Equinox (Vernal).

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Spring Equinox (Vernal)

The spring or vernal equinox was one of four points in the year (the others being the winter and summer solstices and the fall equinox) discovered and marked by ancient peoples who observed the heavens. At the winter solstice, from the viewpoint of an observer in the Northern Hemisphere, the sun rises at a point farthest to the south and is in the sky the least amount of time. As the days pass, the sun rises at a point slightly further north each day and finally reaches a point, three months later, around March 21, when it is in the sky for 12 hours, and below the horizon for 12 hours. That point is the equinox. Viewed from above earth, the equinox is that point where the center of the sun passes through the plane created by the Earth's equator. (Following the summer solstice, the sun will appear to be moving south and again reach a point where the day and night are equal—the fall equinox. In the Southern Hemisphere, the vernal equinox is September 21.

Both the spring and fall equinoxes were important dates in the ancient calendars, the latter being the time for the end of harvest festival for a wide variety of peoples in the temperate and northern climate zones. As the modern calendar began to be developed, however, the spring equinox assumed a far more important role. First, in the Middle East, as the zodiac was developed, the spring solstice, defined as when the sun moved from the sign of Pisces into Aries, was the beginning of the years and the moment for the annual adjustment of the calendar. As the zodiac was passed from nation to nation, the spring equinox maintained its importance. It then became crucial to Julius Caesar whose new Roman calendar posited two crucial events—the beginning of the year on January 1 and the spring equinox in March. Thus for much of the world, the spring equinox became either the beginning point of the year or a major supplements marker and time for celebration. Among the major calendars that begin on the vernal equinox is the new Saka calendar adopted by the postcolonial government of India. The calendar begins with New Year's Day on the vernal (spring) equinox, March 21 or 22, on the Common Era calendar. The Bahá'í Faith's Bodi calendar also begins on the spring equinox (March 21). The last of the Bahá'ís' 19 months, which occurs just prior to the spring equinox, is a month of fasting.

In the mid-19th century, Persia (Iran), where the Bahá'í Faith originated, extensive use began of the zodiacal or Borji calendar, which begins the new year on March 21 when the sun enters the sign of Aries. Each remaining month was begun on the day the sun entered a new sign. The 12 months had either Arabic or Parsi

names. In 1925, the shah of Iran replaced the Borji calendar with an Iranian solar calendar. It also followed the 12 zodiacal signs but gave them their Persian name. Thus, the New Year begins on Farvadin 1 (or March 21 in the Common Era calendar). The years are counted from 622, the year of the Prophet Muhammad's *hegira*. Farvadin 1–4 (March 21–24) is celebrated at the Iranian New Year.

The spring equinox remains an important moment for Western astrology, but has otherwise been a nonentity on the calendars used by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The major spring festivals of the Jews, namely Passover, is calculated on a lunar calendar and thus moved significantly from year to year, as does the Christian Easter celebration.

The primary groups who celebrate the spring equinox in the West currently are the closely related Neo-Pagans and Wiccans. Both use the modern Common Era calendar and meet for the eight equally spaced dates that include the summer and winter solstices, the spring and fall equinoxes, and the four dates halfway between them. For Wiccans and Pagans, the spring equinox begins the planting season, often for the urbanized, a time to plant flowers or a small garden. It is also seen as a time to plant new seeds symbolically in the sense of planning new projects that will produce results at a later date.

One interesting if obscure religious acknowledgment of the spring equinox originates within the Jewish community. In the Talmud, the volumes of Jewish law, written down in the second century BCE, suggests that an individual should make a special blessing when the sun reaches its “turning point,” that is the vernal equinox. Further, it notes that the sun returns to this position every 28 years. Writing in the 11th century, the great French rabbi Rashi (1040–1105), who authored a commentary on the Talmud, taught that the sun, which according to the book of Genesis was created on the fourth day of creation, adds that God placed it in the sky at the exact position it reaches at the vernal equinox. That moment in time every 28 years provides a unique glimpse of the creation, and an opportunity to the one who is thus aware to bless the Creator for his work. This blessing, which a person has the opportunity to offer once every generation, is termed the “Birkat HaHammah.” This event most recently occurred on April 8, 2009.

The Japanese observe Higan, a time to remember ones' ancestors, twice annually, at the spring and fall equinoxes. During Higan, people will visit graves and think about those who have died, especially those who have passed away in the last year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Fast; Common Era Calendar; Easter; Fall Equinox; Higan; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; New Year's Day; New Year's Day (India); Nowruz; Passover; Pesach; Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice.

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Spy Wednesday. See Holy week

Stanislaus, Saint's Day of St. (April 11)

Stanislaus Szczepanowski (1030–1079) was a nobleman born in southern Poland not far from Krakow. He was educated in Paris, became a priest, and subsequently accepted the appointment as the bishop of Krakow in 1072 from Pope Alexander II (r. 1061–1073). Stanislaus was one of the first native Polish bishops. He subsequently became an adviser to the duke of Poland, who strove to become recognized as the king of Poland by the Holy Roman emperor. Stanislaus assisted with that process by encouraging the appointment of papal legates to Poland by Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073–85).

Boleslaus assisted his own cause by building up the church in Gniezno, which emerged as an important new diocese. Boleslaus was crowned king in 1076. Subsequently, Stanislaus encouraged King Boleslaus to nurture a set of Benedictine monasteries whose residents were a significant factor in the Christianization of Poland.

Unfortunately, the supportive relationship between the king and the bishop did not last. A variety of issues emerged, including the king's unfaithfulness to his wife, which led to a series of denunciations of the king by Stanislaus. The unheeded calls to repent eventuated led to his excommunicating Boleslaus. In the midst of an angry confrontation, the king ordered his soldiers to kill Stanislaus, and when they refused, he personally killed the bishop, reportedly as Stanislaus was celebrating Mass at the church on Skalka hill located outside the walls of Kraków. (Other sources say it occurred at a nearby castle.) The bishop's body was hacked to pieces and thrown into a pool. Sources also disagree on the exact date of Stanislaus's death, either April 11 or May 8, 1079.

The public reaction to the murder forced Boleslaus off his throne. He fled to Hungary and took refuge in a Benedictine abbey. Meanwhile, Stanislaus began to be venerated as a martyr/saint. His bodily remains were moved to the cathedral in Krakow in 1245, and eight years later, Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–1254) pronounced him a saint. In Poland, his life is commemorated on May 8, the accepted date of his death. It was originally placed on the Roman Catholic Church's Calendar of Saints on May 7, but in 19869, amid the wholesale changes in that listing, it was moved to April 11, the most commonly accepted date of Stanislaus's death. Each year on May 8, the bishop of Kraków leads a procession from the cathedral to the Church on the Rock at Skalka where Stanislaus was killed. The procession

took on new significance during the years of Communist rule and was promoted in the last half of the century by Polish primate Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński (r. 1953–1981) and the former archbishop of Kraków who became Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005).

As the first native Polish saint, Stanislaus has been named a patron saint of Poland.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Adalbert of Prague, Saint's Day of St.; Casimir, Saint's Day of St.

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Student Day (Russia). **See** Tatiana, Saint's Day of St.

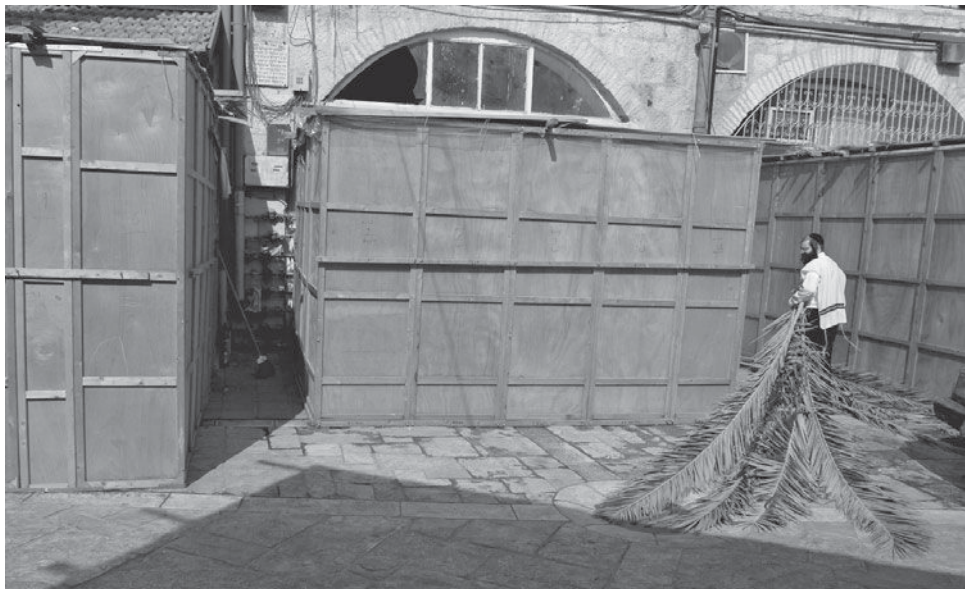
Sukkot

The Festival of Sukkot, or Booths, is a seven-day holiday period that begins on the 15th day of the month of Tishri, only five days after the conclusion of the 10 Days of Awe, which begin with Rosh Hashanah and culminate with Yom Kippur. Sukkot represents quite a drastic transition, from the most solemn holy days in the Jewish year to one of the more joyous. Sukkot is immediately followed by two additional holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah.

Sukkot has a double thrust, in that it functions as a harvest festival but also remembers the 40 years in which the Israelites lived a nomadic life in the Sinai desert after leaving Egypt, but before they made a home for themselves in the Land of Canaan. During this time, believers build a temporary shelter, a booth called a *sukkah* (*Sukkot*, pl.), in which they reside, a shelter that recalls the temporary homes in which the Israelites resided during the wandering.

The basic parameters and timing of the holidays are laid out in the Torah, in the book of Leviticus 23:33–44,

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work. Seven days ye shall bring an offering



An Orthodox Jewish man prepares a roof of palm fronds for his Sukkah. The Sukkah is built for the weeklong celebration of Sukkot. (AP/Wide World Photos)

made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the Lord; it is a day of solemn assembly; ye shall do no manner of servile work. These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to bring an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt-offering, and a meal-offering, a sacrifice, and drink-offerings, each on its own day; beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill-offerings, which ye give unto the LORD. Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of the LORD seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute forever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the appointed seasons of the LORD.”

The sukkah may be built in one’s yard according to particular specifications. It must be large enough to fulfill the requirements for the week’s activity and have no less than two and a half walls made of material that will not blow away in a high

wind. The roof or covering must be made of something that has grown in the ground—tree branches, corn stalks, or bamboo reeds are often used. The covering materials should generally make the dwelling shady, but are left loose, neither bundled together nor tied down. They allow rain in, and those inside can see the stars. If it is raining, rainproof material may be put over the booth to protect its inner contents, but it must be removed as soon as the rain ceases.

In the modern world, quickly assembled sukkot are available for purchase, or they may be made from scratch. Canvas is often used for the walls. One should spend as much time as possible in the booth during the seven days. The first two days of the festival are treated as Sabbaths, and no work is allowed. Though the Bible calls for one day of rest, due to the problems inherent in observing the moon (by which the timing of the holiday and getting the word out to people in the countryside was determined) two days would often be observed to make sure the holiday had been observed correctly. Such two-day observances had become a custom among Jews outside the Land of Israel, and continued even after later sages fixed the Hebrew calendar for the future based on mathematical calculations.

The first and last (Hoshana Rabbah) days of Sukkot include gatherings at the synagogue, while the five middle days include special prayers that are read by the family within their booth. The first (and the second day of the festival in the lands of the diaspora) are treated as Sabbath days of rest. The middle days are less than a Sabbath, but distinct from normal workdays. One may engage in work necessary for getting through the days, including food preparation, but nothing that interferes with the holiday spirit. This time is often treated as a vacation and a time to entertain friends, visit with neighbors, and enjoy festive meals.

Integral to Sukkot is the invitation of symbolic guests to the family booth each day. These spiritual guests, or *ushpizin*, are traditionally seven biblical heroes—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David. Among the Hasidic Jewish communities, there are seven Hasidic heroic figures who accompany the seven traditional heroes, and in the contemporary postfeminist world, seven women are also included in the invitations. It is thought that one of the traditional heroes of the faith visits the Sukkot each day.

Also integral to the festival are the materials (called the four species) that are held during the Sukkot blessings in synagogue. The four species are an *etrog* (citron), a citrus fruit native to Israel, and three kinds of branches—one palm, two willow, and three myrtle branches—which are bound together and are called the *lulav*. The citron is held in one hand and the *lulav* in the other. As one repeats the blessing over these, the four species are waved in six directions (north, east, south, and west, and up and down), in acknowledgment that the Almighty is everywhere. Some see the four species as four types of Jews, and the Sukkot blessing reminds everyone that all four are important to the community.

Closely associated with Sukkot are two adjacent but quite separate holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Because they immediately follow Sukkot, they are often incorrectly thought of as part of Sukkot. Shemini Atzeret is

observed on the 22nd day of the month of Tishri, and everywhere but Israel, Simchat Torah is observed the following day. In Israel, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are observed on the same day, Tishri 22. During the two holidays, one no longer resides in the booths, although outside of the Land of Israel, some continue to reside in the sukkah on Shmini Atzeret, but not on Simchat Torah. Also, the four species are not used on these holidays.

Shemini Atzeret is the “assembly of the eighth day.” It is explained as a time for the Jewish people to have a more intimate and exclusive celebration with the Almighty. They think of it as if God has been their host and they the guests through Sukkot. But as the time of visiting comes to an end, God asks the guests to stay an extra day, to extend their time together. The day is observed as a Sabbath, and those observing it do no work.

Simchat Torah is a day for “Rejoicing in the Torah,” the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Five Books of Moses). Through the year, at synagogue services, one reads through the entire Torah, a few chapters each week. This cycle is completed on Simchat Torah, and on that day, the last chapter of the Torah (in Deuteronomy) is read to be immediately followed by the reading of the first chapter of Genesis. The completion of the cycle is an occasion for rejoicing that occurs as people process around the synagogue carrying Torah scrolls. The service includes spirited singing and dancing in the synagogue with all the Torah scrolls, which are removed from the ark in which they normally rest.

The first day of Sukkot and the joint celebration of Shimin Atzeret and Simchat Torah are official public holidays in Israel. In the days prior to the destruction of the temple and the diaspora of the Jewish people through the Middle East and around the Mediterranean Basin, Sukkot was one of three major holidays (along with Passover and Shavuot or the Festival of Weeks), during which Jews made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the celebration.

Christian Appropriation

The Hebrew Bible was incorporated into the Christian Bible as the Old Testament, and is held in high esteem by most Christian denominations. In North America in the 19th century, from their reading of the books of Moses, a new appreciation of the Jewish festival cycle appeared among a small group of Christian denominations, most notably those that had emerged from the disappointed expectation of the Second Coming of Christ announced by William Miller in the 1830s. Initially, some groups adopted the seventh-day Sabbath. In the 20th century, some groups that grew out of the Church of God (Seventh-day) began to follow the Jewish liturgical year, the most notable being the Worldwide Church of God. For these groups, what they termed the Feast of Tabernacles (tabernacle being the common translation of sukkot in English-language Bibles) became the most important event of the year. Members of the Worldwide Church of God would save 10 percent of their income to enjoy a week of feasting with fellow church members at campgrounds around North America

and increasingly other countries to which the church spread. The money would be spent on fine camping equipment, fine food, and given in offerings at the church meetings.

In the 1990s, the Worldwide Church of God went through a radical change of belief and practice that included the abandonment of its belief in the Old Testament festival cycle. It lost most of its members to several splinter groups such as the United Church of God and the Philadelphia Church of God, and an uncounted number of smaller groups, which continue this Christianized version of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Sukkot is also celebrated among the different Messianic Jewish groups that emerged in the 1970s. These groups consider themselves to be Jews who have discovered that Jesus Christ (whom they refer to by his Hebrew name Yashua) to be the Messiah, a claim rejected by all mainstream Jewish groups. Messianic Jews continue as much of Jewish culture, including synagogue ritual, that they find compatible with their Christian faith and reinterpret Jewish holidays as heralding Christianity. They also invite Gentile Christians to celebrations as a means of educating them about their Jewish heritage.

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See also Days of Awe; Passover; Pentecost; Pesach; Rosh Hashanah; Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah; Yom Kippur.

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Summer Solstice (June 21)

The longest day of the year, the summer solstice, along with the related winter solstice, was among the earliest astronomical phenomena observed by people observing the sky and relating what they saw to the changing weather and agricultural seasons. In the Northern Hemisphere, if one observed the rising sun in the spring, it appears to rise a little bit further north day by day until it reaches a point in the last half of June where the northern drift stopped. After what appeared to be a pause, it began to rise bit by bit further south each day. In the Southern Hemisphere, of course, the drift is exactly opposite. The summer solstice is the point at which the drift stops and pauses before starting in the opposite direction. The

summer solstice, June 21 on the Common Era calendar, occurs in the midst of the northern growing season—after planting has been completed, but prior to the beginning of the harvest.

The summer solstice was celebrated in most ancient cultures. However, most of these celebrations were abandoned as the major world religions spread and absorbed the thousands of indigenous religions. Christianity designated June 24 (the summer solstice on the old Julian calendar, and six months prior to Christmas) as the birthday of John the Baptist, who was believed to have been born six months prior to the birth of Jesus. John's birthday, or Midsummer Day, is observed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and a few Protestant churches. Midsummer Day, blending Christian themes and Pagan practices, is celebrated across Europe and is an official holiday in several countries, such as Latvia and Estonia. In Finland, the summer solstice is known as Juhannus and is seen as the time to begin the celebration of the relatively short number of days with warm weather.

The last half of the 20th century saw the founding of the Neo-Pagan movement, which has as its largest visible segment the Wiccan or Witchcraft movement. This movement was inspired by the ancient Paganism of Northern and Western Europe and posed eight equally positioned holidays that anchored its liturgical year. The summer solstice was one of the eight Pagan/Wiccan festivals. For modern neo-Paganism (and accompanying Pagan revivalist movements in Europe, the summer solstice has become one of its most important holidays and a time for large outdoor gatherings. As relatively little is known about either the practices or the details of belief of the ancient Pagans, a non-literary people, the new Pagans have been able to pour content into their ritual and practice from a variety of sources, most notably Western Esotericism.

In the 18th century, England saw the founding of two organizations that became precursors of the modern neo-Pagan movement, the Druids. As early as 1649, John Aubrey (1626–1697) suggested that the ancient Druids discovered by Julius Caesar when he came to Briton oversaw the building of Stonehenge, a view later championed by William Stukeley (1687–1765), who, it appears, founded the first modern Druid revivalist group in 1717. A more permanent group, the Ancient Order of Druids, was founded in 1781 by Henry Hurle. Over the years, several additional druid groups were formed and died. By 1955, only one group, the British Circle of the Universal Bond, survived. It claimed to be the true descendant of the 18th-century groups, and thus inherited the right to conduct the summer solstice celebrations that had become an annual event at Stonehenge.

The claims of the Druids were caught up in the breakthrough archeological work on Stonehenge in the 1960s, when some scholars discovered that the placement of some of the stones, including those in the very center and the Heel Stones far outside, were arranged in such a way as to point to major astronomical occurrences, most notably the apparent movement of the sun in the sky between the summer and winter solstices. This discovery raised questions of how Stonehenge

functioned in the ancient agricultural cycle of the British Isles, and especially how the knowledge of the solstices and equinoxes were integrated into the religious thinking of British Pagans. Druids and Wiccans immediately seized the new archeological insights and began using it as foundational information for their practice. The Druids saw it as further confirmation of their claims to use Stonehenge for religious rituals.

As Stonehenge passed into the care and control of the British government, and Stonehenge was fenced off from visitors to prevent further damage, the Druids have been the only outsiders to gain access to the site, each year on the morning of the summer solstice, when they ritually greet the rising sun. Access to Stonehenge was withdrawn in 1985 when revilers and police clashed, but was reinstated in 2000. In 2009, some 35,000 people showed up for the summer solstice celebration.

Meanwhile, Neo-Pagans and Wiccans across Europe and North America gather for additional summer solstice celebrations. It is a highly important festival for many Pagans due, for example, to the short summer in northern climes, where this is the first of the festivals in which the weather will allow comfortable outdoor celebration. In North America, It is the first major celebration after the school season and with leisure time to travel to a large solstice gathering away from the city.

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See also Christmas; Fall Equinox; John the Baptist, Nativity of; Juhannus; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Winter Solstice.

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Surya Shashti

Surya (also known as Vivasvan), the deified sun, was one of the primary deities in the ancient Vedic texts, and remains a prominent deity in Hinduism. The sun is pictured as crossing the sky each day on a chariot pulled by horses. He is referred to as the son of Aditi, one of the rare female deities mentioned in the Vedas and of Dyaus (the heavens). He is also mentioned as either the son of or occasionally the



Statue of the Hindu god Surya. (J. Gordon Melton)

husband of Ushas, the dawn. In later Puranic writings, Surya is cited as the son of Aditi and the sage Kashyapa.

The sun god is also known as Savitri. It appears that in ancient times, the sun had different names at different times of day, times of year, or for different purposes. Savitri particularly seems to run parallel with the name Surya, with which it at times is used interchangeably. The sun (under the name Savitri) is worshipped each morning by those Hindus who regularly chant the Gayatri Mantra.

Surya Sashti (also called Chhath) is an annual acknowledgment of Surya observed on the sixth day of the waxing moon during the Hindu

month of Kartika (and thus shortly after Diwali). It is noteworthy as being one of the few Hindu holy days that does not include the assistance of a priest. It is observed by both men and women, but primarily the latter, as many of the prayers of the day are directed to the well-being of one's family, especially one's husband.

Those planning to observe Chhath will sequester themselves for several days prior to the day, refrain from sexual contact, and sleep on the floor. The sun is worshipped in both the evening and the morning (noting that the life cycle begins with death) and a rather severe fast is kept. Ritual purity is a persistent theme, even in relation to the foods offered to the deity, which is vegetarian and prepared without strong seasoning agents such as salt, onions, or garlic. When the observation day itself arrives, they will rise early for a ritual bath and fast during the day. The fast is broken in the evening after the final ritual. This fast includes liquids, while the offering to the sun god includes water. Once begun in the family, it is important that it is perpetuated year by year, though it is not performed if there has been a death in the immediate family in the past year.

Sun worship has been most observed in the eastern Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa, but is seen across the country and now throughout the world in the Indian diaspora. Many will gather at the pools on the sun temple grounds or at other bodies of water and replace the distance observed with their family with the community of others engaged in the ritual.

Bihar has a number of sun temples, usually including a sacred pool of the sun, the focal spot for the observant to gather. The largest and single most famous temple to the sun is found at Konaak in Orissa. This 13th-century edifice was constructed in order to represent the chariot that carries the sun across the heavens each day. Pulled by seven fiery maned horses, the chariot has 24 massive wheels.

This temple once had a tower some 200 feet high, decorated with erotic sculpture resembling that at Khajuraho. The tower appears to have fallen, and is no longer present. Other famous sun temples include Arasuville Surya Devalayam in Andhra Pradesh and the temple at Modhera in Gujarat.

The worship of the sun on Surya Shastri in northeast India competes with the worship of Shiva and his son Murugan among Saivite Hindus in southern India. Shastri (the sixth day after the new or full moon), is considered sacred to Muragan. The sixth day of the waxing moon in the month of Kartika is celebrated as Skanda Shastri by Saivites.

Constance A. Jones

See also Narak Chaturdashi; Skanda Shashti.

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Takayama Matsuri

Takayama is a city in central Japan north of Nagoya. It is home to the Hie Jinja Shinto Shrine, a 12th-century shrine originally built in the Katano section of town but now located on Shiroyama Hill. The principal deity enshrined is Ohyama Kuinokami, viewed as the city's guardian.

In this rather mountainous region known for its forests, winter is long and spring comes late, and is dated from the melting of the snow. When the ground reappears, it is time to celebrate. On April 14–15, the shrine hosts the largest festival in the region, the Sanno Matsuri, the Takayama Spring Festival, which has been dated to the 17th century.

Takayama is a quaint and colorful city through which several small rivers flow, and over these rivers, there are numerous, relatively small, vermilion-colored bridges. The river banks are lined with pine and cherry trees. For the festival, a procession of elaborate floats will traverse an intricate route through town, weaving through the streets and across the bridges. It is the major attraction that brings the thousands to Takayama each April. The floats, some several hundred years old, are decorated with dolls, lacquered wood carvings, and thick woven curtains.

The spring festival is, as with most spring matsuris, devoted to prayers for a good growing season and abundant harvest. An equally well-attended and similar festival is held in Takayama on October 10–11, this time hosted by the Sakurayama Hachiman Shrine. Its purpose is to give thanks for the abundance of the harvest, and signals it is time to prepare for winter.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aki Matsuri; Iwashimizu Matsuri; Nagasaki Kunchi.

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Tam Kung Festival

Tam Kung, one of several patron deities, of fishermen and sailors, was a figure of Chinese legend brought by the Hakka people to the Hong Kong/Macau region

toward the end of the 19th century. He was reputedly a real person, born in Wauai Dung county of Guangdong Province during the 13th century (during the Qing dynasty). As a youth, he gained a reputation for healing people, for being friendly with tigers, and for controlling weather. As the stories developed around him, he was said to be able to change the weather by throwing things in the air from a cup. He threw peas in the air to stop a typhoon or water in the air to bring a shower to put out a fire. Those who go out in boats invoke him for safety and the protection of their means to a livelihood.

His birthday is celebrated on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month (April). There are a variety of temples to him in Hong Kong and Macau, but the one in Shau Kei Wan (built in 1905) on Hong Kong Island is the focus of the main annual festival. On his birthday, visitors might see a kung fu demonstration, a procession, and a performance called the Dance of the Drunken Dragon.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Che Kung, Birthday of; Guan Yin's Birthday; Kwan Tai, Birthday of; Mazu Festival, Goddess; Monkey King, Birthday of; Third Prince, Birthday of the.

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Tatiana, Saint's Day of St. (January 12)

Tatiana was child of a prominent Roman family of the third century CE. Her father was a secret Christian who raised her in his faith. As a young woman, she accepted Christianity and decided to remain celibate as the betrothed of Christ. Named as a deaconess in one of the congregations in Rome, she developed a reputation for her piety and her work assisting the sick and needy.

During the reign of the Roman emperor Alexander Severus (222–235 CE), a persecution of the church was active in Rome. Tatiana was taken into custody. She was tortured and, it was later reported, appeared before her torturers each day as if she had never been cut, burned, or mutilated. She was, however, finally killed around 225 CE by beheading (as was her father). January 12 (January 25 on the Common Era calendar) was named her holiday.

Though a Roman saint, Tatiana is primarily remembered and celebrated in Russia. That oddity is due to circumstances surrounding Russian intellectual Ivan Shuvalov (1727–1797), the country's first minister of education. Among his many accomplishments were his participation in the development of Russia's first university, and its academy of arts. He also had an intimate relationship with Empress Elizabeth (1709–1762). On January 12, 1755, the empress took the occasion of the name day of Shuvalov's mother, Tatiana Rodionovna, to formally approve his petition to

establish a university in Moscow. A church would be erected on campus and dedicated to Saint Tatiana, while the Russian Orthodox Church declared Saint Tatiana the patron saint of students. To this day, January 12, Tatiana Day, is also celebrated as Russian Students Day. Tatiana Day is a public holiday in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Alphabet Day; Eastern Orthodoxy—Liturgical Year; Vladimir, Saint's Day of St.

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Teej Festivals

Teej, a festival for Hindu women, is one of several occasions in which family ties are affirmed ritually—in this case, the bonds of affection and duty that tie husband and wife. It occurs on the third day of the full moon of the Hindu month of Bhadrapad (late August/early September on the Common Era calendar). It also marks the beginning of the monsoon season, following a long summer season and its sometimes oppressive heat. The three-day-long celebration combines hearty feasting with prescribed fasting. The festival is named for a small red insect that tends to appear as the rains start.

Through the year, there are actually three Teej festivals. The main one, celebrated in the month of Bhadrapad, is called Hartalika Teej and is mainly observed in North India and western parts of India. Observed on the third day after the new moon in the month of Shravana, across northern India but especially Rajasthan, is Hariyali Teej. The third, Kajari Teej, is also observed on the third day after the new moon in the month of Shravana, but primarily in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Bihar.

The primary deity reference on Teej is Parvati, the wife of Shiva (Siva). Parvati is regarded by many as the supreme Divine Mother, with all other goddesses referred as her incarnation. *Shakta* Hindu consider her the Divine Shakti—representing the total energy of the universe. Parvati is considered the second consort of Shiva, though she is not different from his first wife Sati, being her reincarnation. Parvati is also the mother of the deities Ganesha and Skanda, the sister of god Vishnu, and the daughter of the Himalayas.

The ancient Hindu sacred texts, the Puranas, tell of Shiva marrying Sati against the will of her father Daksha. She subsequently committed an act of self-immolation during a fire ritual performed by her father. Shiva was intensely grieved by his loss,

but she returned to him in her divine persona and told him that she would return to him. She was reborn as Kali, the dark one. As she grew up, she engaged in austere practices to please Shiva and sought to be reunited with him. He tested her by disguising himself and going to her and using their meeting as a time to criticize himself. She ignored the criticisms. He eventually married her and she moved to his home at the sacred mount Kailash. Parvati's story is told in some detail in an epic poem *Kumarasambhavam* ("Birth of Kumara") written by the poet Kālidāsa.

Celebrations of Teej vary across India, but there are common elements. First, it is a festival of swings. Swings are hung from trees and women dressed in green clothes sing songs in celebration of the advent of the monsoon and the goddess. Parvati is worshipped especially by unmarried young women seeking a mate. For married women, it is a time to visit relatives and to offer prayers for the well-being of their husbands. In Jaipur, on two days, an elaborate procession with the statues of Parvati the main object of attention. For most women, it is a time to dress up, and stalls for saris are regularly held in store in the weeks prior.

In Nepal, Teej is an intense three-day festival. The first day is for feasting and the second for fasting. On both days, the women gather with great frivolity for dancing and singing, and a visit to the local Shiva temple. At the Shiva temple, women circumambulate the Shiva Lingam (a symbolic phallus), where they will also place offering flowers, sweets, and coins. The main puja (worship) is made to Shiva and Parvati, and includes prayer for blessings upon their husband and family. During this time an oil lamp is kept burning, it being a bad omen should its flame become extinguished. On the third day, called Rishi Panchami, the women take a bath with water mixed with leaves of a sacred plant, the datiwān bush. This ritual bath is considered an act that absolves from sins.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Ambuvachi; Dasain; Rishi Panchami.

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Tejomayananda, Birthday of Swami (June 30)

Swami Tejomayananda (the present head of the more than 250 centers of the international Chinmaya Mission) was born Sudhakar Kaitwade in Madhya

Pradesh in 1950. During his student days, he was attracted to the writings of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), and led to his meeting Hindu scripture scholar Swami Chinmayananda (1916–1993) in 1970. He was initiated as a sannyasin (the renounced life) in 1983 and assumed a leadership role in the mission. He came to the United States in 1989 as the head of Chinmaya Mission West. He succeeded to the international leadership of the Chinmaya Mission in 1993. In 2005, *Hinduism Today* named him the “Hindu of the Year.” He has followed his own guru as a scholar of the Hindu texts.

Each year, members of the Chinmaya Mission pause to celebrated Swami Tejomayananda’s birthday. Celebrations are low key in keeping with the swami’s own following of the renounced path, but none the less effusive in its expression of gratitude for his labors on behalf of the mission.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinmayananda, Commemoration Days for; Vivekananda Birthday of Swami.

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Templars, The Day of the Martyrdom of the Holy (October 13)

Among the more notable events in Western Esoteric history was the sudden end of the Templar Order and the significant role the Templars had played since the time of the Crusades. The Knights Templar, officially the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, had been formed around 1119 to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land, especially on the leg of the journey from Jaffa on the Mediterranean Sea and Jerusalem. It operated as a military monastic order with its headquarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in the Al Aqsa Mosque (hence the reference to the Temple of Solomon in their name). Beginning as a relatively small and poverty-struck organization, the Knights grew into a large and powerful order with centers across southern Europe.

Several factors converged in the early 14th century to bring about the Order’s downfall. First, the Holy Land was lost to Muslim forces, significantly reducing their perceived relevance and thus their support. Second, rumors abounded about the Templars’ secret initiation ceremony and created a level of hostile speculation about the inner life of the group. Third, and possibly most relevant, the always financially strapped King Philip IV of France (1285–1314), who owed the Order a significant sum, took advantage of the situation. In 1307, Philip ordered the arrest of the Order’s members in his domain. They were subsequently tortured, rendered a set of incriminating confessions especially related to their supposed clandestine secrets and ceremonies, and, as a result of the latter, executed by being

burned at the stake. Five years later, Pope Clement V (r. 1305–1314) formally disbanded the order.

The abrupt disappearance of the order and the circulation of the confessions (which some people wanted to believe) fueled speculation, and many stories about the Templars and their magical operations emerged, especially after the French Revolution, when a revived Templar Order was founded as a secret magical society. That order would in turn give rise to a host of new Templar groups across Europe. The new Templar groups would take their place in the revived Western Esoteric milieu of the 19th century.

The revived Templar movement and the perceived injustice done the Templars by both French and Catholic forces have given the Templars a place in the history of the Christian Church's persecution of Esoteric movements (and its continued unwillingness to acknowledge them as legitimated religious equals). Among the contemporary Gnostic movements, such as the Ecclesia Gnostica, the Templars are associated with the tradition of chivalry and knighthood, and the element of Gnosticism associated with the tradition through the Middle Ages. They affirm the warrior monastic ideal, noting that individuals must be able to lift either the chalice or the sword depending on circumstances.

The Ecclesia Gnostica remembers the Knights Templar on October 13, the anniversary of the date that King Philip ordered for the arrest of the French Templars. It is observed with a requiem Eucharistic service.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical year; Montségur Day.

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Tenjin Matsuri (July 24–25)

Tenjin Matsuri is the largest annual celebration held in the city of Osaka, Japan. It is built around and dedicated to the Osaka Temmangu Shrine, a 10th-century Shinto shrine. Sugawara no Michizane (846–903) was a famous ninth-century scholar/warrior. At the height of his career, Michizane faced disaster when the new emperor came to believe that Michizane was plotting against him. The scholar died in exile, and subsequent calamities that hit Japan's capital were attributed to

his vengeful spirit. His reputation was posthumously revived. In 949 CE, on the orders of Emperor Murakami (926–957) the temple at Osaka was constructed and dedicated to him as Tenjin, a god of scholarship and fine arts, one of many Tenjin temples opened across Japan. The shrine has been destroyed by fire on several occasions. The present main hall and entrance gate were erected in 1845.

Today, the Tenjin Matsuri is held on July 24 and 25 every year and draws hundreds of thousands of spectators, but has reputedly been celebrated for over 1,000 years. According to the story, the festival began after a sacred halberd (a spear-like weapon) was found floating in the water near the shrine. When the halberd was recovered, the people at the shrine organized a feast and held a Shinto purification ceremony. Then as Osaka became a key Japanese marketing center during the early 19th century, the festival emerged as a major summer event.

On the main festival day, the 25th, some 3,000 people wearing traditional clothing make a procession through the streets of Osaka following a portable shrine with the enshrined Sugawara no Michizane. Other shrines are also included in the parade. At Tenjin Bridge, the group boards boats and, as night falls, creates a torchlit process on the Dojimagawa River through Osaka to Enokoshima, a section of the city. The festival climaxes with a grand fireworks display.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aizen Summer Festival; Aki Matsuri; Chichibu Yomatsuri; Hadaka Matsuri; Haru Matsuri; Kaijin Matsuri; Natsu Matsuri; Sakura Matsuri.

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Tens of Thousands of Lanterns Ancestral Memorial Service (July 13–15, August 13–15)

Twice annually, members of Agon Shu, a Japanese Vajrayana Buddhist group, gather to honor and prayer for their ancestors, especially the recently deceased. They do so through the Tens of Thousands of Lanterns Ancestral Memorial Service held in Tokyo on July 13–15 and in Kyoto on August 13–15. These events roughly coincide with the national Obon Festival in Japan. Included in the memorial observation in August are visits by members to their ancestors buried at the Agon Shu cemetery at Nara, near Kyoto.

At the Agon Shu cemetery, adjacent to each tomb, there is a “Ho Kyo Into,” which contains a small replica of the Busshari (a relic of the Buddha, which was presented to the Agon Shu in 1986) and its casket. It remains there as a constant prayer for Buddha’s continued blessing of the deceased.

As people gather for the memorial service, they will light a lantern upon which their prayers and the names of loved ones who have passed on are inscribed. In the mail ritual, the thousands of lanterns and the deceased ancestors they represent are dedicated to the Lord Buddha.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Great Buddha Festival; Higan; Hoshi Matsuri; Obon Festival(s); Pure Brightness Festival.

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Teppotsavam. See Magha Purnima

Tet (Vietnam). See New Year's Day

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Thaipusam

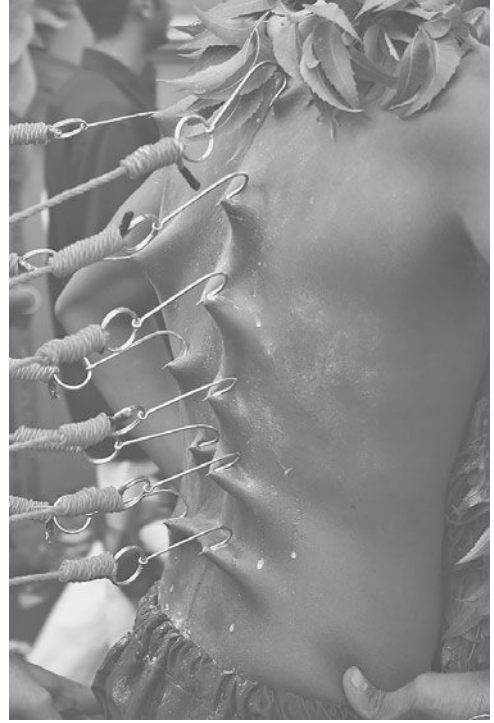
Thaipusam is an annual South Indian festival, also known as Magha Purnima, primarily celebrated by the Tamil-speaking Saivite Hindus of Tamil Nadu. The festival gets its name from its occurrence at the full moon (*purnima*) during Thai, the 10th month of the Tamil calendar that runs from the end of January to the beginning of February on the Common Era calendar. Thaipusam is the birthday of Lord Subramaniya (aka Lord Murugan or Karttikeya), who in Hindu mythology is the younger son of Lord Shiva.

Thaipusam includes some austerities and acts of devotion that many Westerners have found both amazing and offensive. The British banned the celebration in India; however, through the 19th century, many Tamils moved to Malaysia, Singapore, and other parts of the world, where the British needed laborers. Today, while one may still find celebrations of Thaipusam in India, for example, at the Periyannayaki temple in Palani, the most well-known celebrations are held in Singapore and on Penang Island, Malaysia.

The festival extends over a week but culminates in an elaborate all-day procession. In Singapore, it begins at one temple and passes by each of the seven Tamil temples in the city. In Kuala Lumpur, it begins at the Sri Mahamariamman Temple in Chinatown and ends at the Batu Caves north of the city. While most in the Tamil community take part in the procession, a few, mostly young adult males, engage in the more memorable part of the procession. Their actions are the result of a belief that the way to salvation includes enduring a time of penance and pain.

The young men who wish to participate will dedicate a month to preparation for the day of the procession. On the full-moon day, they rise early and take a ritual bath and enter into a trance-like state. Then, they allow their bodies to be pierced with a number of fishhooks. Once they are in place, a large round platform, a *kavadi*, is lifted onto each person's shoulders; lines are attached between it and the hooks. The young men undergoing this ritual, then carry the *kavadi* along the processional route. The intriguing event now attracts thousands of devotees and observers.

Upon reaching the end of the route, which in Kuala Lumpur is a flight of steps leading to the main Batu Caves temple, the men lay down the *kavadi* and some experienced assistants help with the removal of the hooks while a priest leads the puja chants. The wounds are treated with hot ash. Those who participate in the ritual, surprisingly, suffer minimal scarring from their ordeal.



Hindu devotees walk to the Batu Caves temple during the Thaipusam festival in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Participants subject themselves to the painful ritual to demonstrate their faith and penance. (iStockPhoto)

Constance A. Jones

See also Chittirai Festival; Guru Purnima; Magha Purnima.

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Theophany (January 6)

Theophany is the common name to the festival of the manifestation of Jesus as Christ in the Eastern Orthodox churches. In the West, the celebration is usually called Epiphany and is focused on the arrival of the Three Magi in Bethlehem

and the presentation of gifts to the infant Jesus. In the East, the day (January 6 on the Julian calendar and January 19 on the Common Era calendar) is focused upon the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.

This event opens the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the books on Jesus's life and teachings:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight";

John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the country of Judaea, and all they of Jerusalem; And they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey.

And he preached, saying, "There comes after me he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I baptized you in water; But he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him: And a voice came out of the heavens, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased." (Mark 1: 1–11).

In the Orthodox Church, Theophany is a two-day festival. It begins on Theophany Eve, which is a fast day—meaning that no food is eaten during the day until the Holy Supper in the evening. That meal is made without the use of fats, butter, or milk and served without any meat. The food is also blessed with a little holy water, the first blessing of the water of the overall event.

On the day of Theophany itself, a worship service features the blessing of the congregation with water. The priest dips his hand in the holy water and makes the sign of the cross. He breathes on the water three times and prays that God impart to it the grace of redemption, that it might be a fountain of immortality, a remedy for sickness, and effective in destroying demons. He follows with a dipping of the cross into the holy water three times, accompanied by the dipping of a lighted candle. Later in the day, the priest will make the rounds of the parish to bless the homes of the members with the holy water.

Theophany is an important day in Orthodox churches, and even more so in the Ethiopian church where Theophany, called *Timkat*, has been integrated with the belief by church members that it possessed the original Ark of the Covenant that was once housed in the Temple in Jerusalem.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany; John the Baptist, Nativity of; Timkat.

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Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint's Day of St. (October 1)

Though only canonized in 1925, Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), also known as the Little Flower, quickly became one of the most popular saints in the Catholic Church. She was born at Alençon, France, to a couple who both wanted to follow the religious life. Her mother died when she was but four, and she was raised largely by an aunt. Her father, however, was more than supportive of any children who showed any inclination toward the religious life. Theresa was the fourth of his daughters to become a Carmelite nun and was 15 when she applied for entrance into the convent at Lisieux. She was refused because of her young age.

Shortly after her application was refused, she accompanied her father on a pilgrimage to Rome with the goal of asking his support for her intention. At an audience with Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) she broke the normal silence and made her intention known. He considered her request and referred it back to the local superior. This time the request was honored, and she was able to join the sisters at the convent in 1888. Though she would live less than a decade and die in her mid-20s, she became noteworthy for her devotion. Her superior asked her to write an account of her experiences and reflect on the holy life.

Two years after her death on September 30, 1897, her autobiography was published as *The Story of a Soul*, with an English edition appearing in 1901. In it she described the devotion as the “Little Way,” a path centered upon the love of and trust in God. The story of her life found an immediate response throughout the church. It spurred devotion to her as a saint who had abandoned herself in the service of God, her existence keynoted by accomplishment in mundane duties.

With reports of many miracles attributed to her intercession, a formal investigation of her saintliness began in 1914. She was beatified in 1923 and canonized in 1925. Michael J. Gallagher, the bishop of the Diocese of Detroit, was in Rome and present for the canonization ceremonies. He immediately moved to create the first shrine to the new Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, in suburban Detroit. In 1944, in the midst of World War II, Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) named her a patroness of France. The new basilica in her honor at Lisieux (consecrated in 1954) soon rivaled Lourdes as a popular place of pilgrimage in France. In 1997, Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) named her a doctor of the church. She has also been named a patron saint of France, Russia, and Australia.

Theresa's feast day was originally set for October 3. In 1969, during the whole-sale revision of the Calendar of Saints, it was moved to October 1. In 2009, her

relics went on tour through England and were placed in display at the Anglican cathedral in York on October 1.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Catherine of Siena, Saint's Day of St.; Rose of Lima, Saint's Day of St.

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Thingyan. See New Year's Day

Third Prince, Birthday of the

On the eighth and ninth days of the fourth lunar month (usually in May of the Common Era calendar), followers of traditional Chinese religion in Singapore celebrate the birthday of the miracle-working child god Lotos (or Ne Zha) who is pictured riding the wind and holding a magic bracelet and a spear. This deity appears to have originated as an ancient Hindu deity known as Nalakuvara, the third son of the north guardian king Vaisravana. In Chinese mythology, however, he is known as the Jade Emperor's Princely Lord and the Marshal of the Central Altar. Ne Zha was a general for the Jade Emperor (who rules the Chinese pantheon), and incarnated as the third son of Li Jing, the Celestial King Tuota. When he was 10 years old, he fought and killed the son of the dragon king of the Eastern Sea. He subsequently stripped off the flesh from his own bones to keep his parents from being implicated in his deed. Afterwards, his teacher, the Perfected One of Taiyi, used a lotus to reconstitute his scattered souls. In his resurrected state, Ne Zha wields magical weapons given him by Taiyi. He is now believed to be effective in quelling demonic forces.

His birthday is the occasion of a gathering of the many spirit mediums who work within the tradition. It is an occasion for the different mediums to show their competitive spirit in both their spirit-summoning and in acts of personal courage. During the ceremony, they will work themselves into a frenzy and, during their trance state, cut and pierce themselves with swords. Prior to their actions, the floor of the temple space will be covered with sheets of yellow paper, upon which the blood from their wounds is allowed to drip. After they finish, the paper will be collected and distributed to the faithful as protective talismans.

A similar event occurs in Taiwan at several temples dedicated to Ne Zha—the Sanfeng Temple in Kaohsiung, as well as Kaichi Temple in Hsinying on the seventh day of the seventh month, at a time most Chinese will be celebrating the Double Seventh Festival.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Double Seventh Festival; Mazu Festival, Goddess.

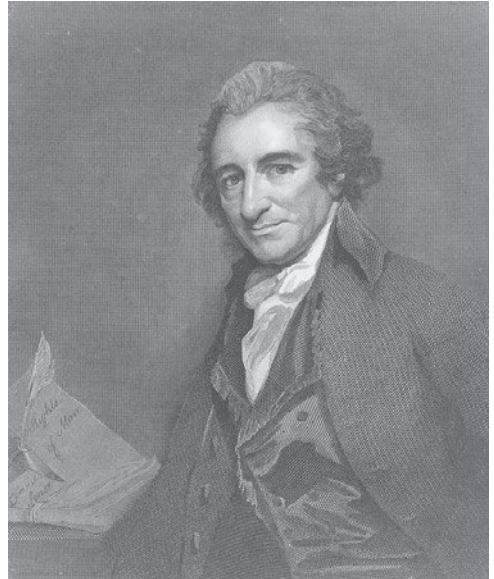
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Thomas Paine Day (January 29)

British-born radical journalist Thomas Paine (1737–1809) is most commonly remembered as the author of a short 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense*, which rallied the American colonists to the cause of revolution. He urged immediate action to declare independence and to establish a republic separate from the British monarchy. As the revolution proceeded, he published essays to keep up the spirits of the troops and the people, and that projected the belief that Britain would soon give up the fight and recognize the new country. He ended the war a hero, but financially in a difficult situation. The government finally gave him a modest award for his efforts. He would later move back to Europe where he penned the *Rights of Man* (1791, 1792) in support of the French Revolution and against the British constitutional monarchy. He fled England, where he was declared an outlaw. Though awarded French citizenship, he alienated his new countrymen by opposing the execution of the former king.



Thomas Paine is the famous author of the pamphlet *Common Sense*. To his credit, he wrote *The Age of Reason*, which was rediscovered by atheists during the 20th century and inspired the celebration of Freethinkers Day on January 25. (Library of Congress)

While sitting in prison in Luxembourg, Paine began writing a new book, which would later be published as *The Age of Reason* (1794–1795). Paine turned from politics to religion and from condemning monarchy to condemning the Christian churches. Reflecting primarily on some writings of Isaac Newton, Paine presented his own version of the Deist universe, in which God established a uniform, immutable, and eternal order and left creation as His only revelation. Paine went further than Newton, however, by rejecting Christianity. He denied the authority of the Bible and condemned specific Old Testament stories as immoral. His attack upon Christianity was marked by a level of bitterness that many could not pass off as simply a difference of opinion. When he finally returned to the United States, Thomas Jefferson was among his few friends. He ended his life in poverty.

His political works survived, though memory of them was lost for a period due to the reaction to his Deism (which church leaders attacked as atheism). Only in the 20th century, as atheism emerged as an organized community, was *The Age of Reason* rediscovered by a larger audience, though writing about Paine still concentrates on his two major political works. Then, in the 1990s, the *Truthseeker*, an atheist periodical, began to call for the celebration of Paine's birthday, January 25, as Freethinkers Day and use the occasion to educate the public on the significant role Thomas Paine played in the history of democracy and human freedom. About the same time, the Thomas Paine Foundation, founded in 1992 by Philadelphia Margaret Downey, began celebrating Thomas Paine Day. The foundation became a standing committee of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, through which it continues its promotion of Paine both as an American hero and a pioneer of Freethought. Included in its work is support for the Thomas Paine National Historical Museum, located on Paine's former farm in New Rochelle, New York.

The celebration of Thomas Paine's birthday spread from the United States to atheists and humanists internationally. Activities focus upon the promotion of the use of reason over faith, and the rejection of arbitrary authority.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; Freethought Day; Ingersoll Day.

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Three Hierarchs, Day of the (January 30)

The liturgical Christian churches both East and West have saint's days honoring Saints Basil of Caesarea known as the Great (30–379), Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390), and John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), all of whom worked in the fourth century in the wake of the legalization of Christianity and the promulgations of the Council of Nicea (324 CE). However, in the Eastern churches, the three are also remembered collectively on January 30, the celebration of the Day of the Three Hierarchs (or Three Archbishops). The three, all leading intellectuals of their century, have been designated the patron saints of education and culture.

This day came about due to a controversy that arose among some scholars in the Eastern churches in the 11th century, during the reign of Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus (1081–1118). Some began to argue that Basil was superior to John, as he demanded the upholding of moral standards, while John tended to emphasize the forgiveness and absolving of the sin of Christians. John's supporters came to his support, while still a third group rose up to champion Gregory over the others. With no clear criteria by which to judge, the arguments persisted, promoting more heat than light.

A solution was proposed in 1084 following the report of a dream experienced by Saint John Mauropus (c. 1000–c. 1075), the archbishop metropolitan of Euchaita. The three hierarchs appeared to him and declared their equality and lack of discord or division. They asked John to speak to the controversialists and ask them to cease their quarrelling and join together the three commemorations in one feast to be celebrated annually. Most of his colleagues received his word concerning the dream and responding by requesting him to compose the liturgy for the celebration. He chose January 30, as three celebrations for the hierarchs were already on the calendar for that month.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Augustine of Hippo, Saint's Day of St.; Cyprian, Saint's Day of St.

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Three Kings Day, Native American Pueblos (January 6)

January 6 is Epiphany on the Western Christian calendar, a day to remember the Three Magi's visit to the Christ child and offer of the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Among the Native people of New Mexico, Epiphany has assumed a unique significance under its local designation the Three Kings Day. New Mexico is home to a set of native people distinguished by their construction of villages known as pueblos, and the Pueblo culture not only covered much of what is now New Mexico, but extended into the neighboring states of Arizona and Colorado. There are 19 Pueblos in New Mexico: Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zia, and Zuni.

Catholic history among the Pueblo people begins in 1539 with the arrival of Franciscan Friar Marcos de Niza and his African companion Estevanico, who settled in the Zuni pueblo. The first mission was not founded, however, until the 1590s and the establishment of Santa Fe. This work grew through the 17th century, only to be lost when the native population rebelled at the harsh treatment given them by the Spanish authorities. New Mexico was reconquered in the 1690s and Catholic work restarted. Over the following century, most New Mexico Native people became Roman Catholic Christians, and the current celebration of Three Kings Day at the pueblos reflects the synthesis of that new faith with the older Native culture.

January 6 has become the day for the installation of new pueblo officers. Pueblo members gather at their churches for special services during which the new governors and officers begin their term of office. The new pueblo governor receives four canes, the symbol of his authority. Following the service, there is a dance ceremony, in which the governor is honored with a set of religious dances, many inspired by different animals. The religious aspect of the dance, considered an expression of thanksgiving, renewal, and harmony with nature, is punctuated by the respectful silence observed by observers during their performance and the absence of any applause during or following the dances.

The 19 pueblos are each distinctive and each has its own patron saint, unique dances, and native dress. In the post-civil rights era in the United States, the native leadership has asserted a new element of self-determination in their religious life, leading to an even greater integration of Native culture in their celebrations of traditional Christian holidays.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Epiphany; Theophany.

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Tihar. See Diwali

Timkat (January 20)

The Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate January 6 (January 19 on the Common Era calendar) as Theophany or Epiphany. This day does not commemorate the arrival of the Three Magi to give gifts to Jesus as in parts of the West, but rather the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist. The Ethiopian celebration has taken on added importance, due in large part to the claims of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church to possess the original Ark of the Covenant that had been placed in the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. An object believed by Ethiopians to be the ark is now kept in the chapel of the Tablet near the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Axum, Ethiopia. Replicas of the ark are placed on the altar of every Ethiopian church.



Timkat is an important celebration in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church whereby people renew their baptismal vows. (Carolyn Pehora/Dreamstime.com)

On Timkat Eve, the congregation's priests and deacons (dressed in their most elaborate liturgical garb) will oversee the removal of the ark replica, the *tabot*, from their parish church and its movement to a local body of water—a lake, pool, or river. The *tabot* is carried by one of the priests atop his head. It is covered in thick cloth to keep away the gaze of impious onlookers. The procession is animated with the sound of ritual bells, and the air is filled with the scent of incense. Once at the site, the *tabot* is placed in a special tent, as the priests proceed to bless the water in preparation for the next day's events. The priests and the most faithful will spend the night in prayer at the water's edge.

Meanwhile, crowds will begin to gather, many pitching tents close by and partying into the evening. As dawn approaches, the crowd gathers around the water and the tent holding the *tabot* as the prayers of the evening continue. The high point of the service occurs as the priest dips a golden cross into the water and extinguishes a consecrated candle in a similar manner. Thereafter, the priest takes blessed water and sprinkles it on the assembled group as a remembrance of Christ's baptism. The *tabot* is then processed back to the church and replaced on the altar, while the congregation disperses to continue the celebration through the rest of the day.

The most elaborate celebration of Timkat is held in Addis Ababa, where the Ethiopian pope, the head of the church, usually officiates, and at Gondar and Lalibela. The annual celebration is a highpoint of Ethiopian church life each year.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Epiphany; Theophany.

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Tin Hou, Birthday of. See Mazu Festival, Goddess

Tirupati Brahmotsava Festival

The Tirupati Brahmotsava Festival or simple Brahmotsavam is a nine-day Vaishnava Hindu festival that celebrates the deity Venkateshwara, one of the more popular forms of Vishnu. Venkateshwara is commonly known simply as Balaji. He is pictured as having a black complexion. He has four hands. In two hands, he holds a discus (a symbol of power) and a conch shell (a symbol of existence). His lower hands point

downward, a gesture that devotees interpret as a request for faith and surrender to the deity's protection. In most temples, his body is covered in elaborate clothing and flowers; thus, the devotee rarely if ever sees the hands gestures (*mudras*).

The most important temple dedicated to Venkateshwara is at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, India. The temple located on the top of the hill above Tirupati is considered the abode of Lord Venkateshwara. The temple rests among the famous seven hills of the Sheshacalam Mountain range, which believers relate to the hoods of the divine serpent Adishesha upon which the recumbent Vishnu rests on the Ocean of Milk. The oldest part of the temple dates to the 9th or 10th century. It appears that it was originally a temple dedicated to Shiva (or his son Lord Murugan), but was transformed into a Vaishnava temple by the Acharya Ramanuja in the 12th century. The Tirupati temple has become the model for Balaji temples now found in countries around the world.

Brahmotsavam is celebrated in the Hindu month of Ashwin (September–October on the Common Era calendar), which on the Tamil calendar is called Purattasi. Preparation for what is one of the more important festivals in Andhra Pradesh will begin several weeks before the start of the festival, with the prescribed cleaning and decoration of the temple with flowers. On the eve before the formal beginning of the festival, a ritual is performed to Sri Vishvaksena, the leader of Vishnu's army and one considered able to remove obstacles and protect worship.

On the first day, the raising of the Garuda flag signals the beginning of the festival. At this point, the Garuda, an eagle-like creature, flies to Devalokam, the realm of gods and angels, and invites them to attend the festival.

Each day of the festival is marked by fire rituals and processions of the deity statues on elaborately decorated chariots (*vahanas*) through the streets of Tirupati. The main statues in the temple are permanently fixed in their place in the temple, but smaller movable statues, referred to as the *utsava murtis*, are brought from the temple for the processions.

Each evening, the statues will be decorated with elaborate new clothes and a surrounding halo of color. Each procession carries its own particular meaning and brings slightly different blessings to those who participate. Many participate looking for very practical ends, including hopes for children, wealth, or success in education.

On the concluding day, the murti of Sri Balaji is given some special decorations. Also, the last day of the festival builds around the Sudarsana Chakra, a disc-shaped weapon identified with Vishnu. At various locations in the festival area, a representation of the Sudarsana Chakra will be bathed and the power from it transferred by various means to the crowd of devotees that has gathered.

The final action of the celebration is the lowering of the Garuda flag. The priests offer their final greetings to the attending deities by chanting various mantras. They thus signal their return to the Devalokam.

Hundreds of thousands flock to Tirupati each year for the festival, while many unable to make the trip will celebrate at the many other Balaji temples.

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See also Anant Chaturdashi; Chittirai Festival; Jhulan Yatra; Kartika Purnima; Parshurama Jayanti.

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Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av is the culminating day of a three-week fasting/mourning period observed annually within the Jewish community in memory of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Tisha B'Av (literally the ninth day of Av) usually occurs on in August on the Common Era calendar. Tisha B'Av references the destruction of the both the first and second temples that had been constructed in Jerusalem, both of which happened to have been destroyed on this day. In 586 BCE, the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, and in 70 BCE, the second temple was razed by the Romans. In the modern world, the commemoration of Tisha B'Av has been expanded to reference a variety of tragedies that had fallen upon the Jewish people in this month, most notably the order to expel the Jews from Spain (1492) and the beginning of World War I (which is tied to the downward slide of Europe toward the Holocaust).

The period of mourning begins on the 17th day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, the anniversary of the day that the walls of Jerusalem were breached in 586 by the Babylonians. During the next three weeks, observant Jews do not schedule celebrative events such as weddings and parties, nor do they cut their hair. They will not don new clothing and generally refrain from the consumption of meat or wine. On the day of Tisha B'Av, the restrictions become more severe. A complete fast is kept. Water is not used for washing, shaving, bathing, and even drinking for the most observant. Women do not wear cosmetics, and couples refrain from sexual activity. People will act in a mournful manner and avoid light-hearted conversation.

As people gather for prayers in the synagogue, they will find the ark (the cabinet that contains the scroll of the Torah) draped in black, and will hear passages from the biblical book of Lamentations and prayers for mourning read.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fast of Gedaliah; Yom HaAatzmaut

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Tohji-Taisai (December 22)

Tohji-Taisai is a Shinto celebration centered on Amaterasu Omi-Kami, the sun goddess, held on the winter solstice each year. In Shinto thought, Amaterasu was the offspring of Izanagi, as was her brother Susano-o no Mikoto. As the sun goddess, Amaterasu exercised her hegemony over the sky and emerged as the ruler of the other deities. She is represented with a mirror and symbolized in the rising sun that appears on the Japanese flag.

Amaterasu became the subject of a variety of Japanese stories that concern the seasons and the rising of the sun each day. The story told at the winter equinox concerns her brother, the storm god Susano-o Mikoto. At one point, he went about ravaging the Earth and was so noisy that she retreated to a cave, which she closed with a boulder. Unfortunately, her action deprived the Earth of light and life. Demons ruled in her stead.

The other kami (deities) were unable to entice Amaterasu out of the cave. Then Uzume, the goddess of joy and happiness, began to do her comical and obscene dances. The gods laughed so hard and so loud that Amaterasu grew curious of what was happening. She ventured forth from the cave and saw her own brilliant reflection in a mirror that Uzume had hung in a nearby tree. As she gazed in the mirror, the gods grabbed her and removed her from the cave entrance. She returned to the sky, and light returned to the world.

Tohji-Taisai celebrates Amaterasu's leaving the cave and light beginning to return to the world.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Kanmiso-sai; Nagasaki Kunchi; Shinto—Cycle of Holidays.

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Tomb Sweeping Day. See Pure Brightness Festival

Transfiguration, Feast of the (August 6)

In the Christian New Testament, there is an account of one of the more memorable events in Jesus's life. As reported in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew:

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid."

And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

This event came to be considered both a great miracle and a beginning point for understanding the heavenly state toward which Christians were headed following this earthly life. In the years after the church became a legal entity under Emperor Constantine (272–337 CE), Christians speculated on the exact location at which the transfiguration occurred. Some suggested Mount Hermon, the peak closest to Caesarea Philippi, where the Bible suggests that the Apostles were immediately prior to the Transfiguration event. By the fifth century, however, Mount Tabor, in Galilee, had emerged as the favored site, and a church dedicated to the transfiguration was built there.

Given its biblical basis, the celebration of the Transfiguration has become one of the most ubiquitous of Christian festivals. It is observed on August 6 by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches. Methodists and Lutherans celebrate it on the Sunday immediately preceding Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. In the (Lutheran) churches of Sweden and Finland, Transfiguration Sunday is the seventh Sunday after Trinity Sunday (which is also the eighth Sunday after Pentecost).

The day has become an occasion to preach from the biblical text relative to the Transfiguration event, which lends itself to discussions of a variety of issues from the nature of life after death to the ordering of church authority.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Lent; Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Trinity Sunday.

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Trinity Monday

Rarely acknowledged today, Trinity Monday was seen in the Western church as the beginning of the long period between the celebration of events around Easter culminating in Pentecost and Trinity Sunday and the events of the Christmas season beginning with Advent. Whereas most Christian holidays acknowledge a specific event in church history, or the death of a specific hero of the faith, Trinitytide is a period for focus upon the unique concept of the Christian faith that distinguishes it from the other monotheistic traditions, most notably Judaism and Islam. As with Judaism and Islam, Christianity affirms one God, but then declares that God manifests in three distinct and co-equal “persons,” the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Sundays after Trinity Sunday have traditionally been a season of instruction in the great truths upon which the faith is constructed, as opposed to remembering the events out of which the church grew.

Trinitytide is carried on the calendars of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches and, in recent decades, has been added to the calendar of a variety of Protestant churches that has begun to use a Christian liturgical calendar as a result of their ecumenical contacts. Trinity Monday has, however, dropped in significance in recent centuries. Among the places it retains some significance is at Trinity University in Dublin, Ireland, where it has traditionally been the day upon which, with pomp and pageantry, the election of new Fellows and Scholars was announced.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Pentecost; Trinity Sunday.

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Trinity Sunday

Trinity Sunday is the Sunday after Pentecost in the Western church (Roman Catholic, Anglican, and most Protestant churches). It is known formally in the

Roman Catholic Church as the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. The day has two purposes. For the church, it is an affirmation of God and the mystery of God's unique essence. For others it is an affirmation of the nature of God as a unity expressed in three persons over against a variety of views that were denounced as heretical.

During the second and third centuries CE, the Christian movement grew into a large international body of believers that was also, in most places, the object of suppression and persecution by the authorities of the Roman Empire. It had inherited a strictly monotheistic view of God from its Jewish background, but had increasingly affirmed the divinity of Jesus. Once legalized and given the backing of the Roman emperor at the beginning of the third century, bishops were able to meet and make decisions about the direction that the church would take. Initially spurred by the challenge of Arius (c. 260–336 CE), church leaders met in council at Nicea in 324 CE and produced what became the orthodox solution to the problem of the nature of God. It promulgated the doctrine of the Trinity, which over the next centuries would be refined and become the unique identifying doctrine of Christian faith.

The essence of the Nicean position concerned the divinity of Jesus Christ, which was affirmed thusly:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven

The full working out of the doctrine of Christ's full divinity and the understanding of the Triune nature of God's existence would engage the church for several centuries after Nicea and the six remaining Ecumenical councils that met through the eighth century. One popular statement of the Trinity in the western church was the Athanasian Creed promulgated in the sixth century, but ascribed to Athanasius (c. 300–373) who championed the Trinitarian position against Arius. It reads:

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father

is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite.

The nature of the affirmation of God as Three in One is at best difficult to understand, the intent of the doctrine being in large part to confirm both the complete humanity and full divinity of Jesus while affirming a strict monotheism. At the same time, the doctrine denies a variety of views that would undermine one of the other of those positions—tritheism (the belief in three gods), Arianism (which denies the divinity of Jesus), and modalism (which also ultimately denies the divinity of Jesus).

Through the early Middle Ages, the idea of the Trinity was integrated into the church's regular lineage. Pope Alexander II (1061–1073) was petitioned to establish a special feast to honor the Holy Trinity, but refused the petition on the grounds that the Church honored the Holy Trinity daily in its worship. John XXII (1316–1334) reversed that position and ordered the feast for the entire Church and set the date as the first Sunday after Pentecost (which is 40 days after Easter). In 1911, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) raised the feast to a celebration of the first order.

Protestants, who were raising issues not dealt with in the traditional creeds of the church, were quick to affirm the creeds and to argue that their position in no way contradicted the position of the early church councils. They professed faith in the Trinity in their confessions of faith, used the ancient creeds in their liturgy, and maintained Trinity Sunday on their church calendars as part of a total affirmation of their orthodoxy.

The Trinitarian understanding of God was, of course, denied by the Socinian movement of the 16th century, and most notably by Spanish physician Michael Servetus (1511–1553), who fled to Protestant territory hoping to escape Catholic authorities. Instead of escaping, however, he was arrested and executed by the Reformed Protestants based at Geneva. Socinians would gain some early support in Poland but survived only in Transylvania. Their ideas would eventually come to England, where they would reemerge in the Unitarian movement.

The doctrine of the Trinity became an issue in the early 20th century when some modern theologians in mainline churches denied the Trinity and/or the full divinity of Jesus. It had remained an issue with Fundamentalist and Evangelical churches claiming that liberal Protestant churches have become slack in discipline and have allowed people who hold a non-trinitarian theology to become pastors, bishops, theologians, and church leaders and to hold responsible positions in spite of their heretical views. Meanwhile, ecumenical organizations such as the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the World Council of Church have designated themselves as fellowships of churches that hold to a

trinitarian understanding of God. At the same time, they have welcomed into membership denominations that traditionally rejected the seven ecumenical councils and the “orthodox” view of the Trinity.

While Trinity Sunday is still carried on the calendar of most Protestant churches, it is usually left to local pastors as to whether the churches they lead will celebrate it year after year. Many non-liturgical churches have simply jettisoned any attempt to follow the liturgical calendar and dispense with any attempt to acknowledge the Christian holidays beyond Easter and Christmas.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches, Trinity Sunday is celebrated as part of Pentecost Sunday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Liturgical Year—Western Christian; Pentecost; Trinity Monday.

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Triumph of the True Cross, Feast of the. See Holyrood or the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross

True Parents' Birthday

True Parents' Birthday is a holy day of the Unification Church, the Korean new religious movement founded by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920) in 1954. It is celebrated on the sixth day of the new year in the first month of the traditional Korean lunar calendar and commemorates the common birthday shared by Moon and his wife Hak Ja Han. Most Unification holy days have been celebrated using the Korean lunar calendar, and in 2010, Moon ruled that all holy days would follow that tradition. The Korean lunar calendar is similar to the traditional Chinese calendar.

Moon was born in 1920, and his wife was born in 1943. Her mother was a famous and long-time follower. Hak Ja Han married Moon in 1960, and their wedding date marks Parents Day, the first holy day of the Church. True Parents' Birthday is one of the five most significant holy days of the Unification church

year. Unificationists believe that Moon and his wife are the spiritual True Parents for a human race that fell because of the transgressions of Adam and Eve.

Unification theology teaches that Sun Myung Moon was asked by God to complete the mission of Jesus. Jesus failed to complete the task of becoming a True Parent and finding a Second Eve. Moon is regarded as the fulfillment of the Second Coming of Christ and Hak Ja Han is the restored Eve. These beliefs form the background to the celebration of their birthdays.

As with other holy days, members engage in an early morning worship celebration. Gifts are offered to Moon and his wife, prayers are said in the names of True Parents, and tables are set with food and a cake. Members are also encouraged to arrange parties and special events after official ceremonies are completed.

James A. Beverley

See also Children's Day; Day of All Things; Parents Day; Unification Church, Holidays of the.

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Tsagaan Sar

Tsagaan Sar, the traditional New Year's celebration in Mongolia, is held on the first day of the Mongolian lunar calendar, which is similar to the Chinese calendar (generally in February on the Common Era calendar). It generally coincides with other lunar New Year celebrations, like the Chinese, and marks the transition from winter to spring.

Festivities begin on New Year's Eve with a celebration called Bituuleg celebrated with special food, traditional games, and storytelling. The arrival of *Bituun* Baldanlham, a local Buddhist bodhisattva, pictured riding a mule, is imminent. She is believed to make three passes by each home, which is acknowledged by the family making three pieces of ice available outside their residence for the mule to drink.

New Year's Day is an affirmation of the extended family. Children visit their parents and then other members of the family according to prescribed seniority and present gifts, traditionally food and pastries. The most senior are presented with scarves, a sign of respect and honor. In the next days of visiting back and forth, each person publicly affirms their understanding of who constitute their kin.

In the Buddhist monasteries, New Year's Eve is a time to burn rubbish, symbolic of destroying the people's sin of the past year, followed by a ritual focused upon Lhame, a dharma protector. Buddhist families will also display their

religious paintings (similar to Tibetan *thankas*) that picture the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The paintings become the center of devotions that might include the burning of oil lamps and incense and the turning of prayer wheels. Prayers are also said to one's ancestors.

Pre-Buddhist shamanistic beliefs and practices have very much survived in Mongolia. On New Year's Eve, the third day of Tsagaan Sar, people gather for the shaman to make an offering to the sky through a ritual to the Seven Stars, seen as seven old men, and the household spirits. This ritual is conducted around a small table, which serves as an altar in one's yard. On this table will be nine bowls of water and sticks of incense. Nearby, a large fire is kindled. The fire's smoke is pictured rising to heaven and melting the ice accumulated on the whiskers of the dragon. Shortly after the New Year, the shaman will hold a ritual in which mundane water is transformed into holy water. The water is subsequently sprinkled on all present as a purifying and protection ritual.

The Communists tried to suppress the traditional celebrations of New Year's Day, but they came back quickly in the 1990s following the government's fall.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's (Preliminary Festival); Chinese New Year's Day; New Year's Day.

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Tsong Khapa Anniversary (December)

Tsong Khapa (1357–1419 CE) was a Tibetan Buddhist reformer recognized as the founder of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The Gelugpa or Yellow Hat school was the dominant school in Tibetan Buddhism prior to the Chinese occupation of the country in the 1950s, and includes among its leaders the Dalai Lama. Above and beyond the special reverence paid to him by the Gelugpa School, all of the schools and sects of Tibetan Buddhism see him as a foremost exemplar of the shared history. Popularly called “Je Rinpoche” (or Precious Master), he is regarded as an enlightened being and the emanation of two divine personages, the bodhisattvas of compassion and wisdom—Avalokitesvara (a.k.a. Guan Yin) and Manjusri.

Tsong Khapa was born in the Amdo province of eastern Tibet in 1357, but according to his traditional spiritual biography, his life story begins long before



Statue of Buddhist deity Tsong Khapa. (J. Gordon Melton)

his birth. According to his hagiography, in a previous life, Tsong Khapa lived in the time of Gautama Buddha (563–483 BCE), the founder of Buddhism. As a boy, he offered a crystal rosary to the Buddha, who gave him a conch shell in return and prophesied that in a future life, he would be a great teacher born in Tibet named Losang Drakpa—the name given to Tsong Khapa when he took his novice monastic vows at seven years of age. Further, it was reported that Tsong Khapa’s birth was heralded by the auspicious dreams of his mother and father.

The Tsong Khapa Anniversary, also called Galdan Namchot or Gahden-Namgye is held in December, on day 25 of the 10th lunar month on the Tibetan calendar. It is generally also seen as the starting point of winter, and people in pre-1950s Tibet would don their winter clothes. Around Lhasa, butter lamps would light up the evening hours. During the day, monks and priests would make their way to the Potala Palace (where the Dalai Lama resided and from which he ruled) and visit the various shrines and stupas therein. Today, the butter lamps will still light up Lhasa, and in the various monasteries, the daily worship hours will include processions holding aloft images of Tsong Khapa.

In the Gelugpa School, it is a practice to set up 1,000 offerings to Tsong Khapa, each offering being a small assemblage of items that relate to the five senses, and then repeat a liturgy called “The Thousand Offerings to Lama Tsong Khapa.” The worship extols Tsong Khapa’s virtues and attainments and allows time for

worshippers to rejoice in their repetition and hope to also make similar spiritual accomplishments.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Butter Lamp Festival; Dalai Lama's Birthday; Guan Yin's Birthday; Losar; Manjushri's Birthday; Mudras.

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Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the month of Shevat according to the Jewish calendar (January–February on the Common Era calendar) marks the beginning of a new year for trees, most notably in Israel. It marks the end of the winter and rainy season and the beginning of a new growing season.

For observant Jews, the observance of Tu B'Shevat relates to the tithing of the crop for the support of the priests (Levites) and the poor. The Hebrew calendar was built around seven-year cycles, in which the seventh year was a jubilee year and the land was not tilled so it could be renewed. During the first, second, fourth, and fifth years, the farmers dedicated a first tithe to go to the Levite tribe, and a second tithe to be brought to Jerusalem, where it would be consumed. On the third and sixth year, the second title became a tithe to be given to the poor.

In judging the tithe to be taken from the fruit of the trees, a new year was to begin when a new set of blossoms sprouted, and thus Tu B'Shevat marks the point between the old year and the new. In the first year of the seven-year cycle, the year following the Jubilee year, those fruits that blossomed before Tu B'Shevat were to be considered as belonging to the first year of the cycle, while fruits that blossomed later belonged to the second year.

Tu B'Shevat remains relevant in Israel, but not so much in the Jewish diaspora. Those who continue to celebrate it do so by eating fruit, particularly fruits mentioned in the Jewish Bible—grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. In contemporary Israel, the almond tree is especially singled out on Tu B'Shevat, as it produces beautiful blossoms (not unlike the cherry tree blossoms in Japan) at this time of year.

In 1890, a new custom was added to the observance of Tu B'Shevat: tree planting. That year, Rabbi Zeev Yavetz, one of the founders of the Mizrachi (religious

Zionist) movement, initiated the practice Zichron Yaakov, an early Jewish agricultural colony. The practice was later picked up by the Jewish Teachers Union and the Jewish National Fund. Annually, more than a million Israelis now celebrate Ti'Bshevav in this manner.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Counting of the Omer; Jubilee Year; Pesach; Rosh Hashanah; Sakara Matsuri.

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Tulsidas Jayanti

Gosvāmī Tulsidas (1532–1623) was a prominent Hindu devotee and philosopher, best known as the author of *Ramacharitamansa*, an epic poem scripture devoted to the Hindu deity Rama, an incarnation of the Vishnu. He was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, during the reign of the Mughal ruler Akbar (1542–1605), a Muslim whose realm included much of India.

Tulsidas's great accomplishment was the translation and adaptation of the ancient epic *Ramayana* (written in Sanskrit) into the Awadhi language (a dialect of Hindi) and giving it grounding in Bhakti devotion. In this and his other writings, he emphasized the significance of the path of devotion in attaining one's spiritual evolution and advocated the use of the repetition of the name of Rama (and Krishna) as one reached for the final liberation (moksha).

Tulsidas Jayanti (appearance day) is celebrated on the seventh day of the waxing moon in the Hindu lunar month of Shravan (July–August on the Common Era calendar). Orphaned early in life, he was taught by Narhari Das, from whom he developed his devotion to Lord Rama. He eventually took the vows of the renounced life as a sannyasin and moved to Varanasi, where he wrote his magnum opus.

Today, many Vaishnava consider Tulsidas as a reincarnation of Valmiki, who wrote the original *Ramayana*. They celebrate his life and teaching on Tulsidas Jayanti by visiting temples, now located in countries around the world, dedicated to Lord Ram and reciting the *Ramacharitamansa*, with intensity. They will also arrange a variety of educational and religious programming to discuss and call attention to Tulsidas's teachings.

Constance A. Jones

See also Guru Purnima; Rama Navani.

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Twelfth Night. See Epiphany

Tyvendedagen. See Epiphany

U

Ugadi Parva. See New Year's Day (India)

Ullam-bana

Ullam-bana is a Chinese festival celebrated in China, Korea, Japan, and throughout the Chinese diaspora. The Mahayana Buddhist scriptures describe the hell realms to which the evil and otherwise flawed souls go after this life, as various points merge with traditional Chinese beliefs. Though most developed in China, Ullam-bana originated in India, where it was tied to the rainy season. Indian monsoon retreats traditionally lasted from the 16th of the fourth lunar month to the 15th of the seventh month. Buddhist monks ceased their largely wandering life and generally spent the time in company with others. For the monk, the time allowed for growth and regeneration, but popular speculation suggested that the travel restrictions actually provided protection for newly arisen life forms who might be harmed by traveling monks. Ullam-bana derived from the last day of the retreat period, traditionally referred to as the Buddha Happiness Day as the monks would have made progress in their cultivation (practice) from their retreat.

Ullam-bana was transferred to China quite early—the first recorded instance dates to 538 CE, when it was noted that the emperor Liang carried out a fast on the 15th day of the seventh month. Over time, the festival was also conflated with the Taoist Zhong Yuan festival of the 15th of the seventh month, in which officials in the lower realms forgive sins. The combined version of the Taoist and Buddhist celebration meant that the seventh month was the time when the gates of hell would be opened and the suffering ghosts could wander freely in the realm of humans. The souls of those trapped in the underworld, whose descendants have made no offerings for them, would be free to cross the boundaries where the underworld and the visible world meet. These souls are known as pretas (the “hungry ghosts” seen in many Hong Kong “vampire” movies), and if unchecked, may cause a variety of mischief and evil. Thus, Ullam-bana also came to be known as the festival of Hungry Ghosts, and the entire month as the “ghost month.”

For the Buddhist, the observance of Ullam-bana derives its content from the *Ullambana Sutra*, a Mahayana text, which tells the story of the arhat (enlightened person) Maudgalyayana (or Mulian). Mulian discovered that his deceased mother was trapped in a realm of pain and suffering most characterized by an inability to eat. He made his way to the netherworld in hopes of ameliorating her situation, but

all his efforts proved futile. Finally, he appealed directly to the Buddha, who informed him that by himself he can do nothing to relieve his mother's suffering. The Buddha informed Mulian that he must make offerings of various items to the sangha (the monks and nuns), and then join them in prayers for his mother's liberation from hell. His action will affect his mother, but also will be advantageous for all of his other deceased relatives.

Ullam-bana marks the day on which Mulian performed what the Buddha had told him to do. Today, the Buddhist faithful will offer prayers for the souls of their ancestors going back seven generations, but focus especially on deceased parents. They will also visit local temples with offerings for the monks and nuns. The prayers and offering of the day are believed to alleviate the suffering of ancestors and shorten the time before they are able to enter the heavenly realms. At the same time, those who follow traditional Chinese religion (and there is no strict line demarking them from Buddhists) may burn spirit money for their ancestors to use in their present spirit life, and will attempt to appease the hungry ghosts by offering them food, drink, and entertainment and use the occasion to also imbibe of the same.

In Japan, Ullam-bana is celebrated as Obon and observed at about the same time, though with slightly different emphases.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Double Ninth Festival; Double Seventh Festival; Higan; Obon Festival(s).

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■ Unbelief

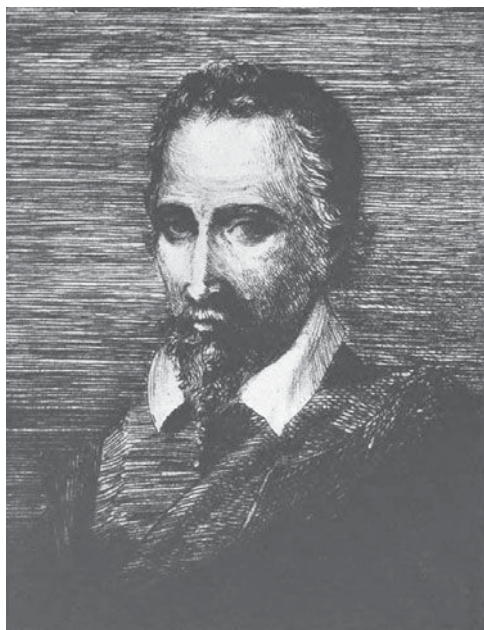
The term “unbelief,” as used in this encyclopedia, refers directly to the modern community of people and organizations who advocate those philosophical/ideological positions that do not include a belief in God, either in the singular or

plural, and have no use for various supernatural realities often seen as the essence of religion, including prayer, miracles (in the sense of divine intervention in the natural order), revelation, or life after death. Such philosophical positions go under a variety of names—atheism, humanism, agnosticism, freethought, rationalism, secularism, and so forth.

Through the centuries, numerous individuals, and even religious groups, have espoused positions that formally could be called Unbelief. In the ancient West, Unbelief has been ascribed to those philosophers who challenged various supernatural assumptions commonly held within Greek society, such as the belief in demonic inspiration and divination. In the East, Jainism and Theravada Buddhism developed extensive religious systems without the need of positing a God as a focus of worship.

However, modern Unbelief does not encompass every form taken by alternatives to theism and polytheism. Rather, it refers to the critical approach taken to Western Christianity that emerged in post-Reformation Europe in which generally in the name of reason, Unbelief was offered as unbelief in Christian theism (and to a lesser extent, Judaism). Attacks upon the belief in God as “irrational” and as lacking evidential support began to be made in the 18th century, but a foundation for these attacks had been laid by the events of the previous centuries, when challenges were made to the specifically Christian idea of the Trinitarian God. Dissent in the form of Unitarianism would be followed in the next century by questioning of the basic ideas of supernatural approaches to religion as doubts were raised about God’s interaction with the world, the validity of prayer, and the existence of miracles. As this position matured, it became known as Deism. Deism, its adherents being accused of atheism, would give way to a full-blown atheism in the 19th century. Atheism would initially manifest as the opinion of a group of individuals, the Freethinkers, and only slowly become the basis of organizations as Freethinkers aligned with various social reform movements calling for freedoms from religiously imposed restrictions.

In the 20th century, the tradition of dissent from religion in the name of reason assumed a more communal form as charismatic leaders and groups offering a more complete vision of a nontheistic belief system, morality, and lifestyles in a secularized social order emerged as alternatives to life as a religious believer. New communities of atheists, humanists, and secularists saw themselves as inheriting the tradition of Western unbelief and offering new forms of it as an alternative to life as a Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew, or Muslim. In the context of the religiously pluralistic contemporary world, nontheistic Unbelief groups assumed a dual role of both dissenting from religion and the prophets of belief systems and communal existence that assumed many of the roles traditionally supplied by religion. This new role for Unbelief is clearly manifest in the adoption of holidays specifically designed to commemorate Unbelief heroes and significant events and to celebrate the reasonable alternative to religion.



Portrait of Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician and vocal nonbeliever (1511–1553). He was executed for his views on religion. (Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Michael Servetus: His Life and Teachings*, 1910)

Early Challenges to Western Christianity

At the beginning of the 16th century, Western Europe was united religiously by the Roman Catholic Church. Although its power varied considerably from country to country, the challenges to its hegemony were relatively localized and were dealt with by the power of the state. However, the attack on the Church's power that began with Martin Luther (1483–1546) in the second decade of the new century would by the end of the century remake the religious map of Europe significantly. Different countries would emerge with Lutheran, Reformed-Presbyterian, or Anglican establishments in power, and additional space would be provided for Mennonites, Socinians (nontrinitarians), and various small mystical groups such as the Schwenfelders.

Relative to the time, the champion of Unbelief was Michael Servatus (1511–1553), the Spanish physician who wrote a book comparing the Christian Trinity to the three-headed hound of hell. For this and other opinions expressed in his 1553 work on the restitution of Christianity, he was first imprisoned by the Inquisition. Escaping, he fled to Geneva, where Reformed Church leader John Calvin (1509–1564) saw to his arrest and execution. Although Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans had challenged a set of Roman Catholic beliefs, they did not disagree concerning the doctrine of God (and that unanimity would quickly push the Socinians from their brief ascendancy in Poland).

Protestantism, while still operating within an orthodox Christian world, did begin the process of criticism of popular supernaturalism that had become institutionalized in Roman Catholicism. It challenged the nature of the Eucharist, the central Christian sacrament, and offered alternatives to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which holds that the bread and the wine once consecrated are transformed in substance into that of the Body and Blood of Christ (although their appearance remains unchanged). Protestants also challenged the use of numerous relics and the doctrine of purgatory (and the accompanying system of rewards and punishments associated with it).

A next step, the challenge to some of the pervasive views shared by both Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians alike, emerged in the 17th century. Deism

affirmed the existence of God but generally denied its miraculous or supernatural elements. Such belief generally saw Jesus as a great moral teacher but denied that as the Christ, he was the second person of a Triune God. Deism was often seen as a natural or reasonable religion (as opposed to revealed religion). According to its initial advocate, Edward Herbert, Lord Cherbury (1583–1648), Deism focused on five affirmations: the existence of a supreme being; the need for worship; piety and virtue as the primary forms of worship (rather than prayer and ritual); the need to repent of shortcomings; and a set of rewards and punishments awaiting individuals in the afterlife. The Deist worldview undercut belief in God’s activity in the world, apart from maintaining the system through natural law and the validity of prayer.

Deism became popular among the educated elite as science developed. Although affirming the existence of God, it supplied a worldview that did not interfere with scientific experimentation and investigation, and a theology that did not answer scientific questions in a way that blocked further inquiry. Deism tended to adopt the view of God as the watchmaker who created the world, wound it up, and left it to run according to natural laws. Deism also included an anticlerical element, and many Deists attacked the Church and the authority of its priests and ministers in secular matters, and publicized immoral acts attributed to church leaders in centuries past.

While arising in the 17th century, Deism became a significant movement in the 18th century. British Deist leaders included Lord Shaftsbury (1621–1683), Alexander Pope (1688–1744), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), and Thomas Woolston (1669–1732). In France, Voltaire emerged as the leading Deist spokesperson and used his literary abilities to attack religion in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular. In the British American colonies, Deism emerged as the faith of the most prominent revolutionaries—Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and George Washington.

Atheism

As Deism was gathering a wide following, a next step was taken away from the dominant religious sentiments in Western society with the development of perspectives that dispensed with the notion of a deity as an ultimate point of reference. Because of the need to establish itself within a society in which the overwhelming majority professes theism, the nontheistic perspective struggled to find space to exist in reference to the larger community; it was commonly perceived as a negative position, simply a denial of God and religion. To the contrary, atheists have generally insisted that their position is not so much a denial of God as the development of a perspective on life after having found no convincing evidence that something called God exists, and of creating a lifestyle in which God is unnecessary either as a moral authority or an object of worship.

Atheism thus includes a variety of belief systems that lack any belief in a God or in multiple gods. Some go even further and say that the very term “God” has

no meaning to them. The assertion of such a perspective has put atheists at odds with the mainstream of religious thought as it has existed in the West since the 17th century. Although hinted at in earlier works, atheism was first openly asserted in the modern West in 1772 in the book by Paul Henri Holbach (1723–1789), *The System of Nature*, though his position had been implied in several earlier texts in which he criticized the Church and Christian theology.

As atheism developed, it did so under a variety of names, each indicating a major theme and a slightly different emphasis in thought—Freethought, rationalism, secularism, and humanism being the most popular. The concept of Freethought developed in the 18th century to describe systems of dissent from specific religious propositions. As science was emerging as a relatively secular endeavor, Freethought insisted that science be free from various theological debates and conclusions, and be allowed to develop its own vocabulary and methodology as it pursued its investigation of the world—that scientists be freed to follow the paths opened by the logic of their thoughts. Inasmuch as scientific conclusions offered dissenting views on what most considered religious issues, from the sanctity of the human body to the age of the universe, Freethought became identified with non-Christian views and eventually with atheism.

Rationalism refers to any one of several philosophical positions characterized by the elevation of reason to the level of a dominating metaphysical or epistemological principle. In one sense, rationalism has a significant philosophical history, as in the philosophical school begun by Rene Descartes (1596–1650). In the more popular sense, however, rationalism refers to a position adopted by many Unbelievers suggesting that religious beliefs and practices be subjected to a rational examination and accepted or rejected on the same basis as one would accept or reject other matters. In examining religions, rationalists tended to reject theological supernaturalism and practices such as worship and prayer, which they tended to condemn as “irrational”—that is, contrary to reason as they used it.

Secularism is a perspective on the world that begins with the division of the world into two realms, the sacred and the secular—that is, the realm of the divine and the religious, and those aspects of life that may be considered apart from either. As originally proposed in the mid-19th century, secularism had a special concern for ethics, and the development of ethical systems apart from theology. Secularism thus came to mean the practical process of improving humans and society without reference to religion or religious institutions. Secularism has also taken on special connotations with regard to the single issue of the separation of church and state, in its more absolutist sense—namely that not only should government not interfere with religion, but that religious ideas should not be injected into governmental processes.

Humanism, a term that covers a variety of philosophical perspectives, arose anew in the early 20th century as a renewed attempt to build a human-centered worldview and ethic that by implication rejected supernatural understandings of the operation of the universe and an ethic based upon pragmatic human values and love.

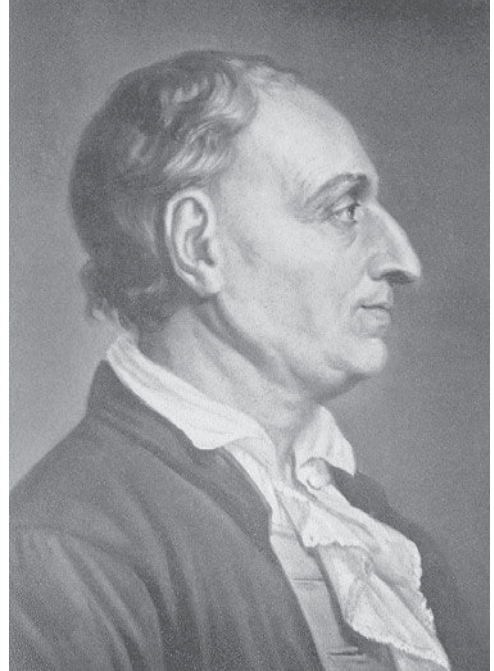
France has been particularly important in the development of Unbelief. The term “atheism” was coined in France, where it was often used in conjunction with the term “libertine” (freed man). The latter term came to be used almost exclusively for sexually liberated individuals, but originally it included those who were intellectually and theologically free. Deism flowered in France in the 18th century, Voltaire (1694–1778) emerging as its champion. Denis Diderot (1713–1774) was possibly the first true French atheist.

The revolution in France, as in the American colonies, was led by Deists but, because of the power exercised by the Catholic Church, included a strong element of anticlericalism. Atheism was present in postrevolutionary France and produced some outstanding lights, such as pioneer sociologist August Comte (1798–1857), but it found its major expression over the next century in various anti-Catholic events, including the secularizing of the schools in the 1880s. Church and state were separated in 1905. French Freemasonry also created a nontheistic form of its esoteric teachings. In the 20th century, atheism has found expression in various Freethought groups (La Libre Pensée being the largest national organization), and atheists have taken to promoting the national policy against minority religions.

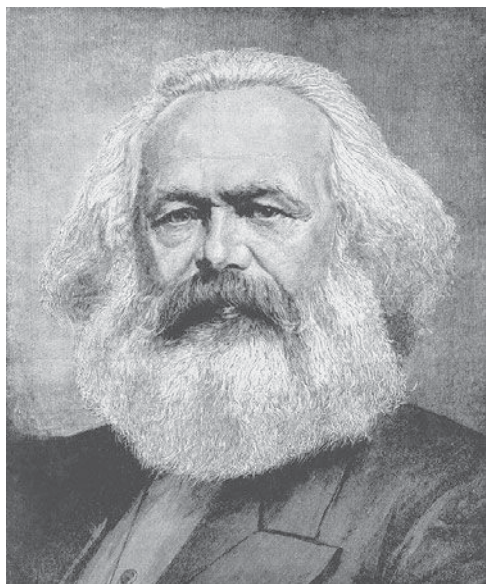
In the last half of the 19th century, throughout the Western world, people who identified themselves as atheists, Freethinkers, rationalists, secularists, or humanists began to create organizations and movements to support their various tendencies, now grouped under the umbrella of Unbelief. Among the earliest and most important of the 19th-century organizations were the First Society of Free Enquirers (founded by Abner Kneeland [1774–1844] in Boston in 1834); the Bund freier religiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands (founded in Germany in 1859); and the National Secular Society (founded by Charles Bradlaugh [1833–1891] in England in 1866).

The Issue of Marxism

In the West, Unbelief has generally distinguished itself from what was arguably the most successful nontheistic system to arise in the modern world, Marxism.



A prolific writer and philosophe, Denis Diderot may also have been France's first true atheist. (Helen Clergue, *The Salon, A Study of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth Century*, 1907)



Karl Marx was the founder of modern communism. He believed that religion was “the opiate of the people.” (Library of Congress)

Marxism has been tied in the public consciousness with totalitarian governments in the Soviet Union and postrevolutionary China.

The philosophy of Karl Marx (1818–1883) was much more anticlerical than atheistic, and he felt that most religion (as experienced in the state-aligned religions of the 19th century) was, as expressed in his most famous quotation, the “opiate of the people”: it lulled people into accepting their exploited status in the lower levels of the social order and acquiescing to rule by the few. He had positive views of some Christian movements, but he argued that both Judaism and Christianity were expressions of stages in human development that had to be surpassed if

progress were to occur. Marx felt that religions are a human product that, like other human ideologies, reflects the social systems that perpetuate them.

Marx’s economic critique of history took form primarily in political parties that went on to participate in the governmental systems of different countries. The atheism that was implicit in his thought became operationalized in the Communist Party. However, it was largely assumed in the 20th century that to be a communist was to be an atheist, and the support for atheism and the resultant disparagement of religion became embedded in the national policies of those countries in which Marxism became the ruling philosophy—the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, North Korea, Vietnam, the countries of Eastern Europe. Albania was the only country, however, that formally (in 1967) proclaimed itself an atheist nation and acted on that proposition by outlawing all forms of religion, closing all of its churches and mosques, and imprisoning many of the clergy. Only in 1991 was freedom of religion restored.

In the Soviet Union, atheism became institutionalized in a succession of organizations: the League of the Godless, the League of the Militant Godless, and the Institute of Scientific Atheism (which continues into the post-Soviet era). Initially, the Soviets focused upon efforts to marginalize religion and end the institutional authority of the church. The formation of the League of the Godless, however, represented the emergence of active promotion of atheism through the press, social institutions, and specialized organizations. Through succeeding decades, religious policy periodically shifted its emphases between the promotion of atheism and the forceful suppression of religion.

In China, the critique of what were seen as various systems of exploitation reached out to include religion. Chinese policy led initially to the cutting of the ties between religious groups and any foreign leadership, especially in the case of Christianity, the complete reorganization of the various religious communities into five approved religious organizations, and the imposition of an ideology that was more aligned to the new Marxist Maoist government. While this reorganization was occurring, many government leaders, representing the Chinese community, argued that religion and Marxism were incompatible. Chinese Communist antagonism toward religion reached its zenith during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Since that time, a much more accommodationist policy has been adopted, though government attacks on religion have continued.

As the new century begins, religion in China survives, and an official policy of freedom of religious belief has been written into the law. It is also the case that the Chinese Communist Party is officially atheist, and that membership in the party and belief in religion are considered mutually exclusive. In between those people who are members of officially accepted religions and the party is a mass of unofficial religious activity that is still subject to periodic suppression by the atheist government. It remains the strong belief in those countries still ruled by Marxism that religion and belief in God will eventually pass away. In the world, the spread of Marxism accounts for the great majority of Unbelief, which includes some 55 percent of the North Koreans, 42 percent of the Chinese, 31 percent of the Czechs, and 27 percent of the Russians.

Modern Western Unbelief

Through the 20th century, as Marxism rose and then faced the crisis of the fall of the Soviet Union, non-Marxist forms of Unbelief emerged as a popular movement that competed for the support of the public with religious groups. Groups professing nontheistic philosophies supported many values commonly offered by religious groups, including answers to the three main religious questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? And, where are we going? Answers to these questions were given without reference to God or the supernatural. Atheist groups also offered moral systems devoid of supernatural authorities and communal fellowship in their various local gatherings, national and international conventions, and even ritual life.

Non-Marxist atheism as a positive philosophy, as opposed to simple irreligion or concern with ultimate questions, enjoyed its greatest response in Europe and European outposts in North America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. It has not fared well in South America, although it found some support in India, where a movement critical of Hinduism attacked many of the supernatural powers ascribed to various Indian spiritual teachers. As early as 1875, the Hindu Free-thought Union appeared in Madras. It survived for two decades. Through the 20th century, a succession of Indian organizations appeared, the most successful being the Indian Rationalist Association, founded in 1960.

In the West, organized atheism has proceeded country by country. In the United States, popular leadership was provided by organizations such as the National Liberal League, the Freethinkers of America (Joseph Lewis), the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, the American Humanist Association, American Atheists (Madalyn Murray O’Hair), and the Council for Secular Humanism (Paul Kurtz). Similarly, across Europe, a number of national rationalist, humanist, Freethought, and atheist groups have been organized.

As early as 1880, the International Federation of Freethinkers (since 1936 the World Union of Freethinkers) was organized. The more substantive International Humanist and Ethical Union was formed in 1952. It now includes member groups from around the world. A specifically Jewish form of Unbelief emerged in the 1960s and eventually gave birth to the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews.

Although the different communities of Unbelief have generally reached a consensus on the issues of God and the supernatural, they have disagreed on the issue of religion. Humanists, in particular, have expressed positive approaches to religion and have developed (or continued) religious structures that they feel contribute to ameliorating the human condition or provide a ritual dramatization of the important events of the life cycle—birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Secular Judaism perpetuates synagogue life under the leadership of rabbis. The American Humanist Association “ordains” celebrants (Humanist ministers) who lead celebration services (analogous to Protestant worship services). Operating in a somewhat different context, the Norwegian Humanist organization Human-Etisk Forbund, one of the largest in Europe, has worked for a secular alternative to Christian confirmation (through which most Norwegian youths have traditionally passed). As the new century begins, these “civil” confirmations are celebrated annually in some 90 locations throughout Norway with some 4,000 young people, approximately 10 percent of the relevant age group, taking part.

In response, many atheist and Freethought groups eschew any form of religious activity. They see themselves as overly against religion rather than providing a non-theistic or nonsupernatural alternative to it. The Council for Secular Humanism is among those groups opposed to associating Unbelief in any way with religion.

In the first decade of the new millennium, neo-atheism, a new, assertive form of atheism, made its appearance in the wake of a rising belief in creationism as a pseudo-scientific hypothesis challenging the teaching of evolutionary biology in the public schools in the United States. The leading voice of the new movement, which differs from older non-Marxist forms of atheism more by its aggressive attempts to proselytize for atheism than any content in its stance, is Richard Dawkins (b. 1941), a professor of biology at Oxford University. He has been joined by writers such as Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens (b. 1949), who lecture widely on evolution and atheism.

Holidays of Unbelief

In the last half of the 20th century as Unbelief communities emerged, its exponents were challenged to go beyond simply critiquing religion and to offer

alternatives to the structures they advocated abandoning. Such alternatives first appeared in the form of ethical perspectives. Humanists, in particular, took the lead in championing nontheistic approaches to the ethical life and entering the social conversation on how society should be organized and regulated. While sophisticated ethical systems were presented by nontheist intellectuals, more accessible moral pronouncements were made in the periodic Humanist Manifestos.

The role of public holidays also claimed the attention of humanists and atheists, who came to understand that in the West, many of the opportunities for communal celebration were tied to a reinforcement of theism and religions, especially the pervasive celebration of Christmas gift giving and the civil religion operating through celebrations of patriotism (Independence Day) or community (Thanksgiving Day). One by one, exponents of Unbelief proposed secular alternatives to religious holidays and religiously tinged national holidays. By the beginning of the 21st century, a whole spectrum of secular holidays had been proposed and found support through the communities of Unbelief, most noticeably in North America.

The most notable of the new proposed holidays picked up on the new pluralistic setting of Western religion and the problem faced by all non-Christians due to the pervasiveness of Christmas, whose celebration dominates the month of December. As other groups developed Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the winter solstice (the Pagan Yule) as a means to participate in the holiday season, Humanists proposed HumanLight as a holiday alternative. HumanLight allows celebrants to affirm many of the values espoused by the more dominant Christmas, including the emotive desire for light in the midst of darkness, while offering another personal rationale for joining in the larger holiday spirit.

The proposed National Day of Reason celebrates a basic value of nonbelievers, the separation of religion and government, and offers a less-than-subtle critique of what Unbelievers see as the religious subversion of a secular government that should operate for the benefit of all its citizens. The National Day of Reason parodies the National Day of Prayer, which is seen as trying to tie religion to government in ways that assume a privileged position in society and undermine the government's ability to respond to all its citizens.

In celebrating Thomas Paine, Charles Darwin, Robert Ingersoll, and Jean-François Lefevre de la Barre, the community of Unbelief holds up the cultural heroes who have embodied their ideals and goals and who have found a place in history quite apart from their role in challenging religion—patriot, biologist, orator, and victim. Finally, as Unbelief becomes established as a community positing positive values in the culture, that community can affirm its own existence in the celebration of, for example, World Humanist Day and Freethought Day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; Death of Jean-François Lefevre de la Barre; Festivus; Freethought Day; HumanLight; Hanukkah; Indivisible Day; Ingersoll Day;

National Day of Reason; Thomas Paine Day; Winter Solstice; World Humanist Day; Yule.

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Unification Church, Holidays of the

The Unification Church was founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920). The church is known both by its early title, the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, and by the more recently proposed name, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. Moon was born in Sangsa-ri (in what is now North Korea) and raised in a Presbyterian family. Unificationists believe that Moon received a visitation by Jesus on April 17, 1935, and that Moon was asked to

complete the mission of Jesus. He is also viewed by followers as Lord of the Second Advent (the fulfillment of the Second Coming of Christ).

Moon's first marriage ended in divorce in 1953, and he married Hak Ja Han, his current wife, in 1960, an event regarded as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Moon claims to be the True Father of fallen humanity. He is viewed as sinless by most Unificationists. Moon and his wife are also known as True Parents and their children are called True Children, and Unificationists believe that the children were born without original sin. Moon's vision to restore fallen humanity involves redemption of the family unit, symbolized most famously in Moon's mass wedding ceremonies.

Moon settled in the United States in 1971 and received scrutiny for his endorsement of Richard Nixon during the Watergate crisis. The church also garnered media attention through giant rallies at Madison Square Garden (September 18, 1974), Yankee Stadium (June 1, 1976), and at the Washington Monument (September 18, 1976).

Moon served prison time in the mid-1980s for income tax evasion, but this was interpreted by Unificationists and others as proof of U.S. government harassment. Moon held strategic meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev on April 11, 1990, and with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung in November 1991. Moon held these meetings up as demonstrations of his complete supremacy over communism. Moon has also taken credit for the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and for the Allied Forces' victory in the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Along with these political matters, Moon has established significant media enterprises (including the *Washington Times*), various educational institutions (including the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Sun Moon University in Cheonan, Korea, with its associated graduate school of theology), and many cultural organizations.

Moon's youngest son Hyung Jin Moon became the top leader of the international movement in April 2008. His daughter, In Jin Moon, leads the American church movement. However, as of 2010, both Hyung Jin and In Jin are in conflict with Hyun Moon, the oldest surviving son, for control of various Unification properties and assets. Hyun Moon seemed to be on course to succeed his father but lost to his younger brother. This has resulted in major division in the Moon family and the Unification Church. In June 2010, Sun Myung Moon issued a proclamation in favor of Hyung Jin, the youngest son, as the leader of the Unification movement.

The major holy days of the Unification Church are centered on the theme of restoration, involving family (Parents Day, Children's Day), the environment (Day of All Things), and God (God's Day). Another major holy day involves celebration of the birthdays of Reverend and Mrs. Moon (True Parents' Birthday). In prior years, all holy days were celebrated according to the traditional Korean lunar calendar (which is similar to the Chinese calendar), with the exception of God's Day, which took place on January 1 of the Common Era calendar. Starting in 2010, God's Day will also be set by the lunar calendar.

Members also celebrate the founding anniversary of the Church (May 1, 1954), the 1976 rallies at Madison Square Garden and the Washington Monument

(Foundation Day), and a memorial day called the Day of the Victory of Love that relates to the death of Heung Jin Moon, Moon's second son, in 1984. He died from injuries sustained in a car accident but his death is interpreted as a spiritual sacrifice, one greater than the death of Jesus.

The various holy days are celebrated with offerings of food and money. Unificationists gather as early as 7:00 a.m. for the holy day events and often have an earlier Pledge service at 5:00 a.m. Members are expected to dress in holy robes or their best clothing. True Parents receive bows of respect and pledges of blessing even if they are not physically present at local Unification sites. Rev. Moon often delivers a message in relation to the theme of the particular holy day. Holy day services usually close with a dramatic shout of victory.

The Unification holy days further illustrate the Unification Church as a Korean movement that draws on themes from traditional indigenous Korean religion. The motif of Moon as the returned Messiah was also influenced by his early contact with several recently founded Korean religions that taught that Korea would be home base for the Second Coming (of Jesus). Further, the holy days continue the great stress found throughout Asia on the importance of ancestors and family lineage. Unificationists are encouraged to pay for the liberation of ancestors through various ceremonies.

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See also Children's Day; Day of All Things; God's Day; Parents Day; True Parents' Birthday.

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Universal Week of Prayer. See Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Up Helly Aa (January)

Up Helly Aa refers to a variety of secularized Pagan midwinter holidays celebrated in the Shetland Islands of the northern coast of Scotland. The various

celebrations, held at different times in the islands' towns, culminated the winter holiday Yule season and recall a Norse Viking heritage largely lost as the islands were Christianized. Norwegians took control of the islands in the ninth century CE, and Christianity came to dominate through the next century. They came under Scottish control in the 16th century. The variant dates of the celebrations are related to the changes of the dating of New Year's Day (from September to January) by James VI (1599) and the adoption of the Gregorian calendar by Great Britain (in 1852).

One of the older midwinter events is known as the burning of the *claviie* held each year on January 10 or 11 at Burghead, a town in northern Scotland. It dates to 1689, when the male youth of the town were chastized by the courts for paying superstitious worship to a "burning claviie" and taking too seriously any pre-Christian customs. A claviie is a tar-filled barrel, which is placed on a pole and lit aflame. It is carried around town following a clockwise route by a small group of men. Bits of smoldering embers from the wood mixed with the tar are dispensed for good luck. The procession ends at a hilltop altar, where the small fire in the barrel is built into a large fire, and the final embers are again collected as good luck charms (and talismans against witchcraft). The modern performance has been severely restricted because of the fire hazard it poses.

In the Shetlands, the burning of the claviie was eventually proscribed altogether and the Up Helly Aa emerged in its stead. The largest of the Shetland celebrations occurs annually at Lerwick, where a torchlit procession emerged in the 1870s to replace the tar barrels burning, which had occurred previously on several occasions each winter. The initial torch procession occurred in 1876. The first Up Helly Aa day procession was held in 1881. It grew significantly the next year, occasioned by a visit of the duke of Edinburgh. The burning of a replica of a Viking warship was added in 1889.

The celebration of the Up Helly Aa, held on the last Tuesday in January, is placed in the hands of a group of men, the Jarl, who become Vikings for a day. Individual members of the Jarl are called *guizer*, their leader being the Worthy Chief Guizer or Guizer Jarl. They will work for a whole year planning the event and creating their costumes.

The day of the celebration begins early with a procession through town by Guizer Jarl and the other Jarl members. They will make several stops on their way to a reception at the town hall. After a toast, Guizer Jarl is given the freedom of the town for the next 24 hours. The main event of the day starts in the early evening as the Guizer Jarl assumes the lead in a procession of the site for the burning of the Viking ship to which, interestingly enough, the public is not invited. After the burning, however, the members of the Jarl move out into the town again for 11 hours of visiting and partying (from 9:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m.). All the public halls are sites for parties, each of which will have visits from multiple Jarl groups. The following day, Wednesday, is a public holiday to allow everyone to recover from the evening events.

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See also Christmas; Winter Solstice.

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Uposattha Observance Day

In the early years of the Buddhist movement, the monks gathered twice a month, on the new and full moons, for a fast. The practice grew out of Gautama Buddha’s interaction with King Bimbisara, the head of the ancient Magadhan kingdom. Responding to the king’s request for a time when lay people could be instructed in the Buddhist teachings, the Buddha instructed his monks to use the day for fasting, a reaffirmation of the rules under which they live (the Vinaya), and spreading the teachings to the public. Monks were especially to recite the rules, every second uposattha day each month.

The uposattha day would commonly begin with a time for the monks to examine themselves, confess any failings regarding their following of the precepts, and make repentance. Most Theravada Buddhist holidays fall on (or begin on) what for the monks is a fast or uposattha observance day. The monastic community is strongest in Theravada countries.

Over the centuries, in different countries, the designation of uposattha observance days was expanded. For example, the number of uposattha days was doubled and came to include the day halfway between the new and full moons, the day of the waxing and waning moons. On those days, observant lay Buddhists would cease work and visit the temples. It came to function somewhat like the sabbath day in the West. In Mahayana countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, six uposattha observance days were designated by including two days in the new and full moon days. All the major Buddhist holidays fall on the new or full moon.

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See also Kathina Ceremony; Vassa.

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Urs Festival

The Urs festival is an annual event at Ajmer, Rajasthan, India, celebrating the life of the Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti (1141–1230 CE). Khwaja Muin-nddin Chisti was a Sufi leader born in Persia who became an adherent of the Chisti Sufi order, a Muslim devotional order founded in the town of Chisti, Afghanistan, in

the 10th century. Having studied the Muslim faith at several schools, the youthful Moinuddin joined the order and became an accomplished leader. After settling at Amjer, he gained a large following because of his attention to the poor and his practice of what was termed the Sulh-e-Kul (peace to all) ideal in an attempt to build understanding and respect between Muslims and non-Muslims. He did not advocate a staunchly sectarian form of Islam. He did not write down his teachings, nor did either he or his immediate students form the order in Amjer. The order would only be founded some years after his death.

In the meantime, he was buried at the Dargah Sharif at Ajmer, and annually on the anniversary of his death, crowds of pilgrims began to gather at his tomb to honor him. The pilgrims would recite poems (*qawwalis*) written in the saint's honor. Various religious assemblies (*mehfils*) would be held at which mass prayers (*fatihas*) would be offered. Professional singers (*qawwals*) gather in groups outside the tomb to sing the praises of the saint. They are noted for the high-pitched sound they deliver.

Over the centuries, thousands became tens of thousands, which today have become hundreds of thousands. During the week of festivities, *kheer* (a milk-based pudding) is cooked in large cauldrons (*degs*) and distributed as blessed food (*tabarruk*).

Many Muslims discourage the honoring of saintly Muslims, especially leaders of the devotion-oriented Sufi orders, but Chisti's disciplined life in service to others earned him a high status in Amjer and led to people making their pilgrimage to the city to pay their respects. They will bring a variety of fragrant objects (flowers, perfumes, incense, sandalwood paste, etc.) which fills the tomb and the space nearby. Devotees who believe that they have been blessed with answered prayers directed to the saint will leave votive offers at the tomb site.

The Urs celebration is begun annually by the leader of the Chisti Order hoisting a white flag. This action is taken on day 25 of the sixth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (hence on a different day annually of the Common Era calendar). Then five days later, on the last day of the month, a site known as the Jannati-Darwaza (or gateway of heaven) is opened, and pilgrims may pass through the gate seven times in the belief that they will henceforth be assured of a place in heaven. On the first day of the new month, Rajab, devotees will perform the ghusal ritual which includes washing the tomb with rose water and sandalwood paste and anointed it with various perfumes. The ritual concludes with the tomb being covered with an embroidered silk cloth.

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See also Ashura; Hajj; Ramadan.

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Vaikuntha Ekadashi

Vaikuntha Ekadashi is the name given to the two fast days on the 11th day of the two halves of the month of Magha (December and January on the Common Era calendar) for Vaishnava Hindus. The Hindu calendar is divided into 12 months, and each month is divided into two halves between the new and full moons. Vaishnava Hindus fast on the 11th day of each half.

The Vaikuntha Ekadashi is observed with an all-night vigil punctuated with Japa yoga (the repetition of mantras), meditation, and the singing of sacred songs (kirtans). At the temple, a gateway is opened through which devotees pass signifying their aspirations to enter vaikuntha or the heavenly realm. The promise of the day is that if it is observed with dispassion, faith, and devotion, and if one fixes the mind on Hari (Vishnu), one can be freed from the rounds of birth and death (i.e., future reincarnation).

The practices of this day are related to two stories from the Hindu scriptures. One tells of a demon named Mura, the father of 7,000 sons, who harassed the gods. The gods prayed to Vishnu to end the harassments, and he sent his own Shakti, his Yog Maya, to kill the demon and his offspring. His Yog Maya having accomplished the task, he decreed that she (Shakti being a feminine energy) would henceforth be known by the name Ekadashi (11) and that the people would observe a fast on this day as a means of being freed of sin and acquiring an entrance into heaven.

The story is also told of a demon that emerged from the sweat that had appeared on the deity Brahma's brow. Wanting to live far from the god, he was told by Brahma to go live among the rice grains eaten by people on Ekadashi and to become worms in their stomach. Thus, on Vaikuntha Ekadashi, believers attempt especially to avoid eating rice, otherwise a staple in the diet. If unable to do a full fast, fruit and milk are eaten.

Constance A. Jones

See also Amalaka Ekadashi; Hari-Shayani Ekadashi; Kamada Ekadashi; Mokshada Ekadashi; Nirjala Ekadashi; Putrada Ekadashi; Vaitarani.

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Celebrants gather together in India for a day of fasting and prayer to Lord Vishnu. (*Hinduism Today Magazine*)

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Vaisakha. See Wesak/Vesak

Vaitarani

Vaitarani is the name of the subtle river which, like the river Styx in Greek mythology, divides this earthly realm from the land of the dead. In the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, the story is told of Lord Brahma asking Vishvakarma the divine architect to create a place of judgment. He asked Vishvakarma to build a suitable place within the realm of Yama, the god of death and lord of the infernal regions that all humans must visit after death.

Vishvakarma built a huge palace with four pits to punish the wicked. Brahma subsequently asked the architect to place a trench filled with water around the palace. This trench is the river Vaitarani. Brahma then called upon Agni (the fire

god) to go into the river to heat the water to the point of boiling. After death, every person must swim across this river. Good souls pass quickly without pain, while the evil ones suffer in the boiling water. The river is also pictured as being full of a variety of filth and waste materials.

There are a variety of ways to prepare for crossing the river, including the doing of many good deeds in one's life or finding a genuine guru (spiritual teachers) and following him or her across. One method, however, is the worship of a cow on Vaitarani, the 11th day of the waxing moon in the Indian Hindu month of Magha (November–December in the Common Era calendar). One source of the phrase “sacred cow,” the cow chosen for Vaitarani is worshiped by being bathed in perfumed water, applying a paste made of the fragrant sandalwood to the horns, and giving it food. It is also a time to make donations or gifts to the priests at the temple.

The cow is worshiped in the belief that a cow is a necessary aid in crossing the river in the afterlife. A cow given to Brahmin priests will later transport weary souls over the river. Thus, it is common when a loved one dies to donate a cow to the temple, a practice described in the *Garuda Purana*, a Hindu holy text.

Another popular belief in India is that when a person deemed to have been sinful dies, he or she may be helped across the Vaitarani River by descendants chanting “*Shree Gurudev Datta*,” a mantra calling upon Dattatreya.

This day occurs on Vaikuntha Ekadashi, a day of fasting for Vaishnava Hindus.

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See also Dattatreya Jayanti; Vaikuntha Ekadashi.

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Valentine's Day. *See* Valentinus, Feast of the Holy

Valentinus, Feast of the Holy (February 14)

Valentinus (c. 100–c. 160 CE) was a prominent Christian Gnostic teacher in Rome in the second century. He is best known because his teachings were broadly condemned by Irenaeus (c. 110–c. 220), the bishop of Lyon, and other representatives of the orthodox Christian tradition. Valentinus was for centuries known primarily through the fragments of his writings that were quoted in works critiquing his position. More recently, a text with the same title as one he was known to have

written was found among the books of the library uncovered in 1945 in the Egyptian desert at Nag Hammadi. Many scholars have identified this text as that written by Valentinus.

Valentinus was born in Egypt and was educated at Alexandria. He appears to have come to Rome in the late 130s and left for Cyprus around 160. While in Rome, considerable controversy flew around him, and at one point he left the church and organized a competing following. Through the middle of the second century, he developed a large following, and his version of what was termed Gnosticism was among the most successful. After his death, his students could be found around the Mediterranean Basin for several centuries.

Once the *Gospel of Truth* found at Nag Hammadi was translated and published, the pioneers of the modern revived Gnostic movement accepted its validity, integrated it into their sacred literature, and assigned to Valentinus a status analogous to a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. The Ecclesia Gnostica, a sacramental Gnostic church, created a Gnostic liturgical calendar not unlike that developed over the centuries by the Catholic Church, with feast days assigned to the religious heroes whose life and work should be remembered. Valentinus was assigned a feast day on February 14.

The assignment of February 14 was done, in part, due to the similarity of Valentinus's name with that of Saint Valentine, whose feast day is February 14, and whose name has been associated with the secular Valentine's Day as a day for lovers. The Gnostic celebration of Valentinus provides an opportunity for presenting an exposition of his own unique spiritual teachings on sexuality. It also provides further opportunity to speculate upon some popular themes among modern Gnostics such as the possible personal relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

During the celebration of Valentinus's Day, quotes from his writings are injected into the Gnostic liturgy, and a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of Valentinus to the world is spoken.

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See also Ecclesia Gnostica—Liturgical year; Mani, Commemoration of the Prophet.

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Valmiki Jayanti

Valmiki (also known as *Adi Kavi*) is the fabled author of the Indian epic *Ramayana*. He was a Hindu sage about whom little is known. He is believed to have lived toward the beginning of the 10th century BCE. He was the first to use the “sloka,” a verse form utilized in the *Ramayana*, and later by others in the writing of such notable texts as the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*.

Though a Brahman (of the highest Indian caste), he grew up within a family of robbers. Along the way, he encountered the *saptarsis* or seven sages, the seven planetary spirits associated with the seven stars of the Big Dipper (Ursa Major). He began to practice japa yoga, repeating the name of God (Rama) for long hours each day and reached enlightenment. His name came from the anthill or *valmika* that had been built over his body as he engaged in austerities during this period of his life.

Valmiki originally learned of Rama, the incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu, from the sage Narada. However, Rama was also a contemporary, and Valmiki wrote as one participating in some of the stories about which he wrote. Valmiki resided in a hermitage in the Bundelkhanda district in central India, and there at one point he entertained Rama’s wife Sita when she had been banished from his presence.

Valmiki credits the deity Brahma with commanding him to retell the story of Rama in the form of an epic poem in Sanskrit using the new poetic meter Valmiki had discovered. Brahma also gave him visions that revealed all the details of the story as he wrote.

Apart from his writing the *Ramayana*, very little is known about Valmiki. He describes himself briefly as the 10th son of the sage Prachetas. He is remembered as a virtuous man and a great poet.

On his birthday, people will pray to him and will have parades/processions through the streets honoring him.

Constance A. Jones

See also Parshurama Jayanti; Rama Navani.

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Vamana Jayanti

Vamana Jayanti celebrates the appearance (birthday) of Lord Vamana, the fifth incarnation of the deity Vishnu. It is observed by Vaishnava Hindus on the 12th day of the waxing moon during the Hindu month of Bhadrapad (August–September on the Common Era calendar). Much of the Vaishnava sacred literature concerns the 10 lifetimes Vishnu is said to have come to earth in human form. Lord Vamana came on this occasion to deal with a demon named Mahabali.

Mahabali had defeated Indra, the king of the gods (devas) and lord of heaven, who ruled from Amaravati, the capital of Svarga, the heavenly realm where the righteous dead reside awaiting their next reincarnation. It stands at the entrance to Svarga, which is located on the mythical Mt. Meru. Driven from Amaravati, Indra appealed to Vishnu.

As Vamana, Vishnu approached Mahabali, who ignored the warning to have nothing to do with this person. Indeed, he showed his gracious side by requesting that Vamana ask any gift of him. Vamana asked only that he be granted a piece of land equal to what he could cover in three steps. Mahabali ignorantly agreed to the request. At this point, Vamana turned from his dwarfish appearance into a giant, and in two steps covered the heavens and earth. There being no place left to make a third step, Vamana stepped on Mahabali's head, thus sending him to rule in Patala, a region inhabited by good demons.

Those who observe Vamana Jayanti by offering pujas (worship) to Vishnu are said to obtain strength to resist and even destroy their enemies.

It is to be noted that in Hindu thought, Mahabali is not an entirely evil entity. In fact, he is considered by many to have been a benevolent ruler and is looked upon in quite a positive light. Such is the case in Karala. At the end of some accounts of his interaction with Vamana, Mahabali is asked a boon of Vishnu, namely that once a year he be allowed to visit the people he formerly rules. Thus, each year, the people of Kerala celebrate Onam, the day of Mahabali's annual visit. In what has become a four-day festival, women prepare elaborate flower displays called Pookkalam in front of their homes, while the men engage in boat races.

Constance A. Jones

See also Janmashtami; Narasimha Jayanti; Onam; Parshurama Jayanti; Rama Navani; Varaha Jayanti.

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Varaha Jayanti

Among the 10 incarnations of the Hindu deity Vishnu, in several he appears in a half-human/half-animal form. Such is the case with his incarnation in a boar-like appearance as Varaha. Varaha's story begins at Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu, his consort the goddess Lakshmi, and the serpent upon which they rest. At one point, they were visited by some saints who, as they approached the seventh gate of the realm, were stopped by two guards named Jaya and Vijaya. The saints considered their entrance being challenged an act of disrespect, and they cursed the two guards by declaring that they would be reborn on earth.

On earth, they were reborn as the brothers Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. In their earthly existence, they did a considerable amount of trouble. Hiranyaksha pulled the earth to the bottom of the ocean, prompting Vishnu to incarnate as Varaha, who, after a lengthy battle, slew Hiranyaksha. He then used his boar's tusks to lift the earth out of the watery depths. In another incarnation as Narasimha, he would slay Hiranyakashipu, and the brothers would eventually return to their posts as guards in Vaikuntha.

The dating of Varaha Jayanti is different in different parts of India; for some it is during the month of Chaitra (March–April on the Common Era calendar), and for others it is in the month of Bhadrapad (August–September). In either case, those who offer their worship on this day are promised Vishnu's blessing, wealth, and good health.

Constance A. Jones

See also Janmashtami; Kartika Purnima; Narasimha Jayanti; Parshurama Jayanti; Rama Navani; Vamana Jayanti.

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Vartan's Day, St.

Saint Vartan's Day is an Armenian national holiday that recalls the Battle of Avarayr, which occurred on May 26, 451 CE. An Armenian army under the command of General Vartan Mamigonian (d. 451 CE) met an overwhelming force of Persians. The Armenians had formally converted to Christianity at the beginning of the third century CE, but by the middle of the fourth century, they found half their

country under Persian hegemony. In the middle of the fifth century, the Persian ruler attempted to establish the Zoroastrian faith throughout his kingdom. The Armenians refused to accept the Persian decrees on religion, and the Persian king sent his army to enforce his will. At the battle of Avarayr, the Armenians were defeated, and Vartan and more than a thousand of his soldiers were killed. The battle did not lead to a complete Persian victory, however, and for the next generation, Armenian forces operated from their mountain homeland to resist Persian rule. The issues were not resolved until 484, when the Treaty of Nuvarsag allowing the Armenians to maintain their Christian faith was signed.

In retrospect, the battle at Avarayr was seen as a defining moment in the emergence of the integrating Christianity into the national self-image of the Armenian people. General Vartan was canonized as a saint, and those lost at Avarayr were designated as martyrs of the faith. The battle and the lengthy set of hostilities that followed are now viewed as assigning the Armenian Apostolic Church a key role in the maintenance of the identity and unity of the Armenian people.

Saint Vartan's Day is celebrated on the Thursday before the beginning of the Lenten season (late January or early February on the Common Era calendar). It has become a time to gather for both patriotic and religious affirmation, a time to recall the often difficult eras in which Armenia was ruled by non-Christian neighbors (including Turks and Russians in recent centuries), and proclaim the continued loyalty of the people to their faith. In the United States, the cathedral of the Primate Archbishop of the American diocese is dedicated to Saint Vartan.

Among those who fell at Avarayr was Leondius the Cleric (or Ghevond, in Armenian) and a set of priests (including the Catholicos, the head of the Armenian church, and his fellow bishops). They are remembered for entering the battle carrying a cross in one hand and a sword in the other. Their role is celebrated on the Tuesday immediately preceding Saint Vartan's Day, designated the Feast of the Ghevondians, which is marked by a gathering of the church's clergy for a commemorative worship service.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Forty Martyrs' Day; Nino, Saint's Day of St.

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Vasant Panchami

Vasant Panchami, also recognized as the first day of spring in India, is a festival focused upon Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, music, and art. In Bengal,

where its observance is among the strongest, it is also called Saraswathi Puja. In Hindu mythology, she is the wife of the creator deity Brahma and closely associated with Kamadeva, the god of love (understanding that desire was the first thing to stir at the dawn of creation). She presides over every form of art and is even said to have invented writing in general and Sanskrit in particular.

Saraswati is especially honored each year on the fifth day of the Indian month of Magha (January–February on the Common Era calendar). She is often pictured dressed in yellow (a color of auspiciousness and spirituality), and on this day, women will don yellow saris or wear yellow accessories to their clothes. They will also distribute yellow sweets to be consumed within their family, and color food by adding saffron.

Vasant Panchami is a day to think about the person one loves, a spouse or special friend. In rural areas, people note that the crops are already in the field and ripening. It has in the modern world developed a reputation as a Hindu form of Valentine's Day. This day is also identified with the day the deity Shiva was struck with an arrow from Kamadeva. The gods had sent Kamadeva to arouse Shiva from his deep meditation, as he was neglecting his duties toward the world. They wished to fall in love and began a song that could destroy Tarakasura, a wicked demon. As Parvati approached Shiva, Kamadeva hit him with an arrow. Shiva became enraged, opened his third eye, and burned Kamadeva, even though he later fell in love with Parvati and married her.

Believers engage in a variety of activities on this day. In recognition of Saraswati's role as discoverer of writing, children might be taught to write their first words. It is a day to venerate one's ancestor. One might attend a temple to make a special puja to Saraswati. Some will rise in the early morning to bathe and then engage in the worship the Sun, Mother Ganga (the deity of the sacred river Ganges), and the earth.

Constance A. Jones

See also Chinese New Year's Day; Spring Equinox.

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Vassa

In the early centuries of the Buddhist movement, and to this day in Southern Asia, much of the life of the Buddhist community revolves around the Vassa or Rains

Retreat. For three months each year, the monks ceased their travels and routines and settled in one spot, as the rainy season made being outside uncomfortable and moving about the countryside difficult. The Buddhist movement began soon after Gautama Buddha found enlightenment as he sat under the Bodhi tree and meditated. A short time afterward, he traveled from Bodhi Gaya, where the enlightenment event had occurred, to Sarnath, where some of his former cohorts in the search for enlightenment had gone. Not having any faith in the process, the Buddha had ultimately chosen to find Truth. Upon reaching Sarnath, he found the five former colleagues and delivered his first discourse, later written down as the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra*, in which he discussed the basics of his new approach, most importantly the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Four Noble Truths. This event is remembered and commemorated in the annual Asalha Puja Day celebration.

As a result of the Buddha's discourse, one of the five companions immediately accepted the teachings and attained a level of enlightenment. Shortly thereafter, all five joined together and accepted ordination as monks and by that act created the monastic fraternity, the Sangha. This action occurred just as the rainy season began, and the Buddha and his first converts decided to stay in Sarnath at the Deer Park. Over the next three months, the 5 grew to be 60. Today, the monks still stay in the temples or monasteries to which they may be attached. Once the rains ended, the monks scattered in different directions to spread the teachings, but returned each year to spend the rainy season together in retreat.

This period became a time to exercise discipline within the community, and monks were given the opportunity to confess any deviation in their behavior, find forgiveness, and move forward in their practice. Intense times were spent in meditation. While Buddha was still alive, a set of rules for their common life were established by the Buddha (the Vinaya). Once an order of nuns emerged, they were given some additional rules and joined in the practice of the rainy season retreat. In some monasteries, monks dedicate the Vassa to intensive meditation.

Though a time primarily for those in monastic orders, Buddhist lay people often take the occasion as an opportunity to strengthen their own spiritual life. Some will adopt one or more ascetic practices—for example, giving up meat, alcohol, or smoking for a period. In Thailand, lay believers will often assume temporary monastic vows during Vassa, move in with the monks for a month or more, and then return to their lay existence. Monks generally count the number of years they have been a monk by counting the number of Vassa retreats they have observed.

The end of the Vassa three months later also became an occasion for another widespread celebration, termed Boun Ok Phansa in Thailand and Laos. Those monasteries that have had at least five monks in residence during the Vassa retreat period may also plan a celebration called Kathina in which the eligible monks received gifts of cloth from which new robes may be made.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Asalha Puja Day; Boun Ok Phansa; Kathina Ceremony.



Buddhist monks and believers gather during a ceremony to mark the beginning of Vassa in Bangkok, Thailand on July 27, 2010. Vassa is held during the rainy season and is a time for believers to come together and reaffirm their faith. (AP/Wide World Photos)

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Vata Savitri

Vata Savitri is a day for married women, the object of the observance being the longevity and well-being of their husbands. It occurs on the 13th day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Jyaishtha (May–June on the Common Era calendar), though in some places it is also observed on Jyaishtha Purnima (the day/evening of the full moon). It appears to be a popular day in Maharashtra.

Vata Savitri is based on a legendary story of Savitri, the daughter of King Aswapati, and her husband Satyavan. According to the scriptures, Savitri married

Satyavan in spite of the fact that she had been warned by a seer that he would only live one year. As it happened, a year later, Satyavan went out to cut wood and fell ill. As he lay dying, Savitri cradled him. A figure approached them and informed Savitri that he was Yama, the god of death, and had come to claim her husband's soul. He took the soul and headed toward his abode.

As her husband and Yama departed, Savitri offered worship at the sacred vata (or banyan) tree and then left immediately to follow Yama to the underworld. Meanwhile, Yama took notice of her piety and devotion and was so pleased that he restored Satyavan's life.

Today, on Vata Savitri, women rise early in the morning, bathe, dress in bright gay clothes, and, having eaten no food, join with their friends and acquaintances at a banyan tree. As they gather, they will retell the story of Satyavan and Savitri among themselves and offer prayers for the prosperity and good health of their husbands. Their activity there will include sprinkling the tree with water and with red powder and wrapping it with cotton threads. They conclude by circumambulating the tree seven times.

When they return home, they will paint a banyan tree on a wall using turmeric powder and sandalwood paste as an object of worship. At the end of the worship, they will break their fast. They will conclude their day by making offerings to the local priests.

Constance A. Jones

See also Ahoi Ashtami; Chaitra Purnima; Teej Festivals.

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Vernal Equinox. See Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal)

Vesak. See Wesak/Vesak

Virgen de los Angeles Day (August 2)

Virgen de los Angeles Day, a national holiday in Costa Rica, recalls the discovery in 1635 of a small stone statue of a woman with a child in her arms by a young woman named Juana Pereira. Initially, Pereira considered the statue a new plaything, and she took it home. But then the next day, she found what appeared to be a similar statue at the same spot as the original. She took it home only to discover that the first statue had disappeared. A third time, the statue at home

disappeared and repeated at the original site, which prompted Pereira to take it to the local Catholic priest. He immediately recognized the statue as a representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and reverently placed it in a chest at the church. It disappeared from the chest, however, and the priest and girl found it again at the original site.

The priest took the occurrence to indicate the Virgin's desire to be at the place where Pereira initially discovered her, and shortly thereafter, a small shrine was erected to house the statue. Veneration of the statue spread during the next decades. A chapel was built and, in 1652, an association was created to care for the chapel, which stood at the edge of Cartago, then the capital of Costa Rica. The area immediately surrounding the chapel was home to native people, Africans, and people of mixed blood rather than the Spanish who formed the ruling elite. That the statue was made of a dark rock was not lost on those who flocked to the chapel.

The statue's significance increased in the 18th century when, on two occasions, it was the focus of prayer to protect the people of Cartago from volcanic eruptions (1723) and an epidemic (1737). Then, in 1782, as the Virgen de los Angeles, the Virgin Mary was designated the patron of Cartago. After the capital was moved to San José, she was named the patron saint of the country.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Basilica de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles replaced the chapel. August 2, the anniversary of the statue's discovery by Juana Pereira, is now a national holiday and a time of pilgrimage to the statue. Annually, on August 3, a procession takes the statue from San José to the main church in Cartago, where it remains until the first Sunday in September, when it is returned to its permanent home. The small statue itself is only three inches in height. It is now richly clothed in gold, and only the face of the Virgin and the Child are visible. It is displayed within a large, gold monstrance that enlarges its appearance. The small image was solemnly crowned in 1926, an action related to proclaiming the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. The feast of the Queenship of Mary now occurs on August 22, when the statue is in Cartago. In 1835, Pope Pius XI (r. 1846–1878) designated the shrine church as a basilica.

Of additional interest relative to the Virgen de los Angeles, the stone on which the statue was originally discovered is now in the basilica. The stone shows signs of being worn away as thousands of pilgrims pass by and touch it. A spring of water has appeared beneath the stone, and pilgrims may take the water home with them for use in anointing the ill.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Aparecida, Feast of Our Lady of; Mary—Liturgical Year of the Blessed Virgin; Queenship of Mary, Feast of.

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Vishwakarma Puja (September 17)

The Vishwakarma Puja (or Jayanti) is a rare Hindu celebration celebrated on the solar rather than the lunar calendar, hence occurring every year on September 17. It is celebrated on Kanya Sankranti Day, the day in Hindu astrology that day when the Sun deity, Surya Bhagwan (or Vivasvan) leaves the astrological sign of Simha rashi (Leo) and enters into Kanya rashi (Virgo), an event that occurs on the same day each year.

Vishwakarma is, in Hindu thought, considered to be the divine engineer of the world. He is, like other deities, assigned a day as a birthday (jayanthi), a fact that raises some interesting issues. He is seen as the original creator of the world, thus having existed before days were created. It seems highly illogical to think of him as having originated on a particular day. He did not incarnate in human history as did, for example, Vishnu. To assign him a day would suggest that he was in turn created by an even older deity. However, most who worship him do not worry about such matters and simply seek a commemorative day to especially acknowledge him.

The few who worship Vishwakarma who have also responded to the problem of his birthday focus their devotion on another day called Rishi Panchami Dinam, or the day of the five rishis. They acknowledge that Vishwakarma had no birthday. Instead, they propose celebrating a commemoration of the day in which his five children (the rishis) declared their solidarity and prayed to their illustrious father. This day is set on the lunar calendar and thus changes each year on the Common Era calendar.

Vishwakarma Jayanthi or Rishi Panchami Dinam is celebrated by industrial workers, artists, craftsman, and weavers. Vishwakarma is also revered by the engineering and architectural community and a spectrum of professionals in all fields. Craftsmen will worship their tools in the deity’s name. Vishwakarma is seen as the original architect and the one who passed on the rules for constructing buildings.

There are only a few temples at which Vishwakarma is the principal deity, but he often finds a secondary place in Vaishnava temples. He is pictured as a mature man with a full white beard, holding tools in his left hand. He is considered the sculptor of the famous Jagannath Temple in Puri, India, a temple known for its statues (and worship) of Krishna and his siblings. Worship of Vishwakarma is often done at the worshipper’s workplace before the tools of the trade rather than at a temple.

Constance A. Jones

See also Chaitra Purnima; Hanuman Jayanti; Makar Sankranti; Narak Chaturdashi; Surya Shashti.

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Visitation, Feast of the (May 31)

In the growing focus on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Roman Catholics, especially members of the Franciscan order, began to define the Joys of Mary, key moments of special happiness in Mary's earthly life as recorded in the Bible. Initially, five events were noted, but their number increased later to seven. The second joyful event, the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, is described in the Gospel of Luke 1:37–55. Mary's words in verses 46–55 would become a popular Roman Catholic prayer known as the Magnificat. These verses also make up one source of the even more popular prayer, the Hail Mary.

Liturgical interest in the second joy is traced to the notable Franciscan, Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274), who proposed a special feast day to commemorate the event which called attention to both John the Baptist (Elizabeth's child) and Mary, who had just learned that she would be pregnant with Jesus. Elizabeth was much older than Mary, and, after years of marriage without having a baby, it was believed that she was barren. The Franciscans adopted the celebration and led in its spread internationally. It also became a central feature of Cistercian's worship life.

Drawing on both the Bible and extra-biblical sources, some Marian devotees have made much of the visitation event. The Bible notes that when the two women met, John jumped in his mother's womb and that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested that John was also filled with the Holy Spirit and thus born without original sin. As such, John would join Jesus and Mary as a third person since the fall of humanity into sin who was born without original sin. Parallels have also been drawn between the account in Luke's gospel with David's visit to the Ark of the Covenant recounted in I Kings 6 in the Hebrew scripture (the Christian Old Testament). From the likenesses between the two events, Mary is often seen as the New Ark of the Covenant. As the first Ark carried God's Words to Moses, so the second Ark carried the "Christ, the Word of God," to the world.

Pope Urban VI (r. 1378–1389) elevated the festival to a celebration for the whole of the Roman Catholic Church, setting its date on July 2. In 1610, Saint Francis de Sales (1567–1622) and Saint Jane Frances de Chantal (1572–1641) founded a new religious order for women, the Order of the Visitation of Mary, in France. As the order spread, it was commissioned to found and staff a number of schools for girls. In 1969, Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) moved the Feast of the Visitation to May 31, so that it would fall between the remembrance of the

Annunciation (on March 25) and the celebration of the nativity of John the Baptist (on June 24). In making that adjustment, he also moved the date of Feast of the Queenship of Mary from May 31 to August 22. Pre-Vatican Catholics and Anglicans tend to adhere to the July 2 date in their celebration of the Visitation.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Annunciation, Feast of the; John the Baptist, Nativity of; Queenship of Mary, Feast of.

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Vivekananda, Birthday of Swami (January 12)

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was an Indian spiritual teacher and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) who was a pioneer in bringing Hinduism to the West. He graduated from Calcutta University, and it was during his years as a student that he was initially attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, whom he met in 1881. He subsequently became a part of the group of young men who had gathered around the mystic. He emerged as the leader of the group that gradually reformed as a monastic order. They took the vows of the renounced life as sannyasins in 1887, a year after Ramakrishna's passing. They were joined by Sri Sarada Devi, Ramakrishna's widow.

Vivekananda developed a twofold mission emphasis of inspiring people and then teaching them the practical knowledge that will lead to improvement in their lives. To accomplish this mission, he began to plan the establishment of an organization that could carry out the vision he was developing. In the meantime, in 1893, he took the bold step of traveling to the United States to attend the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in the summer of 1893. He received a strong response from his presentations in Chicago and remained for three and a half years in North America, where the first Vedanta centers were set up.

Soon after his return to India in 1897, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission, envisioned as a place where monks and lay people would jointly propagate Vedanta and engage in a spectrum of social services, which led to the founding and maintaining of hospitals, schools, colleges, hostels, and rural development centers. The mission also organized to respond to natural disasters. In 1898, he

acquired land in West Bengal, where the headquarters of the mission, now known as the Belur Math (monastery), would be established. In the few years remaining, he made one more trip to the United States. He died in India in 1902; he was but 39 years old.

The various organizations Vivekananda founded flourished through the 20th century. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission developed affiliated centers across India and around the world, especially in the lands of the Indian diaspora. Vivekananda is honored as both an outstanding teacher of Vedanta Hinduism and the founder of a large international movement. Each year on his birthday, the many centers of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Society observe January 12 as a day to gather for programs that praise Vivekananda and discuss his life and teachings. It is a day to read from his many books, engage in meditation, and remember his accomplishments. Possibly the largest celebration occurs annually at the Belur Math of the Ramakrishna Mission in West Bengal.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ramakrishna's Birthday; Sarada Devi, Birthday of.

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Vladimir, Saint's Day of St. (July 15)

Vladimir Svyatoslavich (958–1015) the Grand Prince of Kiev, is remembered for moving from his own baptism as a Christian to “baptizing” symbolically the whole people of Russian and Ukraine into the church. Among Russian Orthodox believers, he has attained a high status as one of the saints labeled as *isapostolos* or “equal to the Apostles.”

Vladimir's grandmother and reputed tutor was Olga (c. 890–969), the first Russian ruler to convert to Christianity. Vladimir's father, Sviatoslav of Kiev (c. 942–972), did not become a Christian, and Vladimir, an illegitimate son, was raised as a Pagan. When in 969, Sviatoslav divided his kingdom and named Vladimir ruler of Novgorod the Great and his brother Yaropolk (c. 960–980) of Kiev, a civil war resulted that led to Vladimir's eventual victory and his brother's death. In the next years, Vladimir was an active Pagan, and at one point, according to the story, he decided to sacrifice a human to a Pagan deity. The human chosen turned



Vladimir I was the grand prince of Kiev from 980 to 1015 CE and is considered to be the founder of Russian Christianity. (John Clark Ridpath, *Ridpath's History of the World*, vol. 4, 1901)

out to a Christian, and his family refused to turn him over for the sacrificial ceremony. The open defiance of the Pagan led to a mob attacking and killing the young man and his father. The incident appears to have caused Vladimir to rethink his own religion and institute a broad inquiry into the religious option in his kingdom.

Ultimately, Vladimir chose Orthodox Christianity, his emissaries being duly impressed with the architecture and vivid worship life of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople. In 988, following his conquest of the town of Cherson in Crimea, he negotiated with the Byzantine emperor Basil II (976–1025) with the goal of marrying his sister Anna. Basil sought support for a war in which he was engaged. These negotiations became the occasion of his receiving Christian baptism and

his subsequent marriage to Anna. He took his new faith quite seriously, however, and upon his return to Kiev, he moved against his former Pagan colleagues and worked to build the Christian movement across the lands he ruled. He ordered his subject en masse to go to the Dnieper River and receive baptism. He built the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, the first stone church building in Kiev.

The last years of Vladimir's life were relatively uneventful. He seems to have lived peacefully with most of his neighbors. After his death, his body was dismembered and passed around as relics to the different churches and religious institutions he had founded. Two of his children also attained sainthood—Boris and Gleb—both of whom were murdered during the internecine wars that broke out after Vladimir's death (1015–1019). They were both named saints in 1071 by Russian church authorities.

Vladimir's sainthood is commemorated by the Russian Orthodox Church on July 15 (July 28 on the Common Era calendar).

J. Gordon Melton

See also Cyril and Methodius, Saint's Day for Sts.

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W

Walpurgisnacht (April 30–May 1)

Walpurgisnacht (or Walpurgis Night) is a day named for Saint Walpurga (c. 710–c. 777), a British nun who went as a missionary to what is now France and Germany. Two of her brothers were also later canonized, and she was the niece of Saint Boniface (d. 754 CE). She died on February 25 and was initially buried at Heidenheim, Bavaria, where she had been abbess of a community of nuns. A hundred years later, following her canonization on May 1, her relics were moved to Eichstätt (also in Bavaria). She was canonized around 870 by Pope Adrian II (r. 867–872).

Saint Walpurga's designated feast day is February 25, but in various places where it has been regularly celebrated in Scandinavia and Germany, especially Bavaria, her feast day commemorates both the movement of her relics to Eichstätt and her canonization, both of which occurred on May 1.

The date of the transfer of Saint Walpurga's relics coincided with an older May Eve festival celebrated in much of northern Europe with a night of dancing by the light of bonfires. The celebration would go on until dawn, and in many places, Walpurga's feast day became associated with May Eve, which was popularly called Walpurgisnacht (or Walpurgis Night) throughout Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and the German-speaking world. In German-speaking lands, a tradition tied Walpurgisnacht to a continuing belief in the presence of witches, and on this night they would hold a large celebration. This belief is amply illustrated in a short story, "Dracula's Guest," originally written as one of the opening chapters for *Dracula*, the novel by Bram Stoker. The story takes place in Munich, Germany, as Jonathan Harker is on his way to Transylvania. In the 1931 film version of *Dracula*, the opening scene, which in the book occurred on Saint George's Eve, has been shifted to Walpurgisnacht.

Across Europe, a variety of pre-Christian festivals had been celebrated at this time (halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice) under different names, to mark the beginning of summer. These pre-Christian celebrations were revived in the late 20th century by the Wicca/Neo-Pagan movement in the English-speaking world, generally under the name Beltane.

In 1966, Anton LaVey (1930–1997) formally announced the formation of the new Church of Satan in San Francisco, California, on Walpurgisnacht. Though the church never became a large organization, it enjoyed great fame over the next generation. Church members celebrated their own birthday as the main holiday each year, but Walpurgisnacht was the second-most important day in the church



Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan, poses for a photograph with a female church member. (AP/Wide World Photos)

year, as it combined both a traditional date reputedly celebrated by those who opposed Christianity, and the anniversary of the founding of the Church of Satan. On this date, members would gather for rituals to which nonmembers were not permitted and held parties restricted to church members and close friends.

On this day in contemporary Europe, numerous cities sponsor a variety of secular celebrations featuring music, dancing, and bonfires combined with both a skeptical and satirical approach to the associations of the day with witches and things occult.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; George, Feast Day of St.; Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice.

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Waso Full Moon. See Asalha Puja Day

Water Splashing Festival. See Songkran

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

What came to be known as the ecumenical movement, which had as its goal the reunion of the many Christian denominations into one ecclesiastical body, emerged in stages through the 19th century. Primary support came from the many missions established by European-based churches in the colonies established by their home countries. Missionaries often found the issues that had divided Christians in past centuries back in Europe to be irrelevant and a hindrance to evangelism in the colonial context. Simultaneously, Christians in Europe, for purely

theological reasons, called for an end to denominational divisions and began to organize events at which prayer and action to end denominationalism was advocated.

Early in the 20th century, two American Episcopalians, Father Paul James Wattson and Sister Lurana White, cofounded the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, an Anglican religious order. The pair was committed to the reunion of the many different Christian churches with the Roman Catholic Church. They enlisted the aid of a colleague in the Church of England, Rev. Spencer Jones, and together committed themselves and proposed to others a new level of prayer for a reunited church. They offered a plan for an eight-day effort (termed an “octave”). It was held beginning with the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter (January 18) and the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (January 25). Shortly thereafter, Fr. Wattson and Sister Lurana became Roman Catholics. Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) gave his initial blessing to the octave and his successor, Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–1922) extended its observance to the whole of the Roman Catholic Church.

Seen primarily as a Roman Catholic effort, the Octave for Christian Unity did not catch on widely outside of that church. Then in 1933, Fr. Paul Coutrier, a priest from Lyon, France, recast the Octave as what he termed the Week of Universal Prayer for the Unity of Christians. This new approach led directly to the Decree on Ecumenism promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1964, which suggested that it was desirable for Roman Catholics and other Christians to pray together for Christian unity.

Meanwhile, quite apart from the earlier suggestion of Fr. Wattson, Sister Lurana, and Rev. Jones, the Faith and Order ecumenical discussions that would lead to the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948 had made its own proposals for Christians to pray for Christian Unity. These prayer efforts were continued by the new Council, which also welcomed the Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity subsequently became a joint event cosponsored by the World Council’s Commission on Faith and Order and the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity. It is held January 18–25 in the Northern Hemisphere and during the week beginning with Ascension Day and culminating with Pentecost in the Southern Hemisphere.

During the week, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches will promote daily gatherings that focus on prayers for unity, including widely circulated liturgies. Each year a particular theme is chosen. In 2010, for example, reference was made to the centenary of the important ecumenical gathering at Edinburgh, Scotland, often thought of as the formal beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, whose theme was “Witnessing to Christ Today.” The 2010 theme was, “You are witnesses of these things.”

J. Gordon Melton

See also Ascension Day; Chair of St. Peter, Feast of the; Conversion of St. Paul, Feast of the; Pentecost; World Communion Sunday.

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Wesak/Vesak

Early Buddhist sources (apart from the sutras) suggest that Gautama Buddha's birthday, day of enlightenment, and his paranirvana or death all occurred on the same day of the year. That day, designated Wesak, or Vaisakha, is the night of the full moon of the Hindu month of Vaisakha (usually in May on the Common Era calendar). Through the centuries, Wesak has primarily been an event commemorated by Theravada Buddhists for whom its celebration emerged as the most important festival of the year. Originally a time to remember the birth and death of Buddha, it evolved primarily into a celebration of his enlightenment. In the 20th century, Wesak has been adopted as a favorite celebration within the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions, especially in the West.

The observance of Wesak usually includes both a formal and an informal aspect. The local temple or monastery will take the lead in the formal part of the celebration, which will include a procession by the monks, the presentation of an offering, and the chanting of sutras. In more recent times, the ceremony might also include a presentation on some aspect of the Buddha's teachings followed by the bathing of a statue of the Buddha. The Buddha's birth is usually acknowledged in the evening of the full moon with a Vaisakha Puja (sacramental offering).

Lay leaders take the lead in the more informal aspect of Wesak, which will occur over several days. Gathering will include liberal amounts of food and drink, various artistic and cultural programming, and even academic discussions of Buddhist history and theology. This more informal program will usually begin immediately after the more formal rituals.

As Buddhism has become a recognized part of the global religious community and as the Buddhist diaspora has taken Buddhists to countries around the world, Wesak has acquired new functions. It is now a popular time for interaction between Buddhists of different sectarian and ethnic backgrounds, and a place to showcase the dialogue between Buddhists and their non-Buddhist neighbors. These functions have attained a high level of importance in the West, where Buddhists often exist as a religious minority.

Wesak is an official holiday in Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, and, since 1888, in Sri Lanka. Wesak was accepted as the official Buddhist holiday by the United Nations in 1998. In Korea, Wesak is known as the Festival of the Lanterns. Along with the more familiar rituals

conducted at Buddhist temples around the world, the Koreans decorate their temples and related structures with paper lanterns, covered with Buddhist symbols and inscribed with wishes for a long life. These lanterns will also be featured in parades through the street. The festival was designated as a Korean national holiday in 1975.

In the 20th century, several Western Esoteric groups have made an interesting appropriation of Wesak. In particular, theosophical teacher Alice A. Bailey (1880–1949) added three holidays that she saw as particularly relevant to the quest for spiritual enlightenment to the calendar of Arcane School, which she founded—Easter (full moon in April), the Day of Goodwill (full moon in June), and Wesak (full moon in May). In the 1970s, as Bailey’s thought was integrated into the New Age movement, the celebration of Wesak as a ceremonial occasion spread far beyond the Arcane School and the several groups that had originated from it.

In Tibet, the birth and passing of Gautama Buddha is acknowledged during their Sakya Dawa Festival, held on the 15th day (full moon) of the fourth lunar month of the old Tibetan calendar.

Edward Allen Irons

See also Bodhi Day; Hana Matsuri; Nehan; Sakya Dawa Festival.

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White Lotus Day (May 8)

White Lotus Day, the primary commemoration shared among the various divisions of the Theosophical movement, remembers the cofounder of the original Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). H. P. Blavatsky was born in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk), Ukraine, and grew up in an affluent Russian family. Her marriage as a teenager to a Russian army general did not work out, and she left her home, traveled widely, and spent much of her time investigating esotericism, especially mediumship and Spiritualism. After moving to the United States, while investigating American Spiritualism in 1873, she met Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). Two years later, she, Olcott, and lawyer William Q. Judge (1851–1896) founded the Theosophical Society. Soon afterward, she completed her early summary of occult truth, *Isis Unveiled*, published in 1877. The



Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. (Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 1891)

following year, she and Olcott moved to India and, from their base in Madras, grew the Theosophical Society as an international movement.

Here, she also claimed contact with a set of Masters or mahatmas, teachers of occult wisdom from whom she received messages that became the basis of a number of books and led to her reputation as a messenger of the Masters. That reputation would be besmirched in 1885 by charges of fraudulent mediumship brought by Richard Hodgson (1855–1905), an investigator from the Society for Psychical Research based in London. The resulting scandal caused her to leave India and finish her career in Germany and England, where she tried to live down the scandal. In London, she completed her most important work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1889), and she met and converted

atheist orator Annie Besant (1847–1933) to Theosophy, and left her legacy to her young disciple. Besant would lead the society through the early decades of the 20th century.

In the years since Blavatsky's death, Theosophists have attempted to rehabilitate her reputation, while acknowledging the role she played in shaping the movement both intellectually and experientially. They will gather each year in small groups to remember her accomplishments and note their debt to her.

Constance A. Jones

See also Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); World Invocation Day.

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White Sunday (October)

White Sunday, the largest annual event honoring the children in the Samoan Islands, is held on the second Sunday of October. The event celebrating the blessings of children is sponsored by the various Christian churches, from Roman Catholic to the Congregational Christian Church (the largest in the Islands) and the various Protestant churches—Assembly of God, Methodists, Baptists, etc. Traditionally, the children of each congregation dress in white and place a crown of fragrant blossoms on their head. They parade to church, where their parents are already waiting, and present a program consisting of Bible verse recitations, skits, and music. After the church service, they are treated to a large meal in their homes at which their parents do all the serving. It is the one meal each year in which the children are seated and served ahead of the adults. They are also allowed to eat all they want.

In 2009, the White Sunday celebration took on new meaning. It occurred just two weeks after the island suffered a massive earthquake (8.3 on the Richter scale) followed by aftershocks and a tsunami. A significant percentage of the several hundred who died were minors. Church sanctuaries were among the buildings destroyed. Though still reeling from the event, the churches decided to hold the White Sunday celebration as usual. Congregations that had lost their buildings were invited to merge their celebration with neighboring churches.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; World Communion Sunday.

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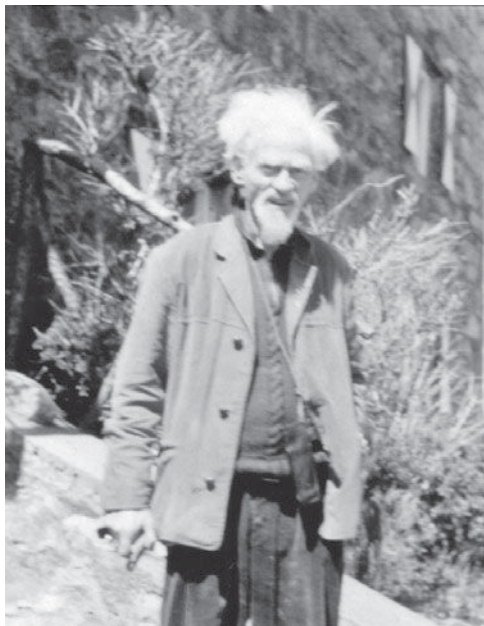
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Whit-Monday. *See* Pentecost

Whitsunday. *See* Pentecost

■ Wicca/Neo-Paganism Liturgical Calendar

Through the early and mid-20th century, there were a variety of attempts to revive ancient Pagan worship, at times as an individual devotion, and on a few occasions among small groups. These efforts remained quite isolated until the 1950s, when Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964), a retired British civil servant residing in England,



Gerald Brousseau Gardner traveled around the world learning about various faiths and from his research founded Gardnerian Wicca. (Raymond Buckland/Fortean Picture Library)

responded to the removal of the country's archaic anti-Witchcraft laws that had in the 20th century primarily been used against Spiritualist mediums. Gardner had followed a unique spiritual path that included adherence to Freemasonry and Theosophy, and veneration of a female deity. Back in England after many years in Asia, he began to put together a new religion given form by his attempt to recreate pre-Christian Pagan religion. There being little written record of the actual practices and/or rituals of the ancient Paganism in Western Europe, Gardner assembled bits and pieces of magical lore, more modern magical ritual material and his own writings, to create a new religion that he called Witchcraft and is today commonly called Wicca.

Gardnerian Witchcraft was released to the public in stages, with the initial announcement of its existence coming in several books. As people contacted him and learned the basics of the religion, he initiated priestesses and priests to carry it to North America. Through the remaining decades of the century, it grew into a substantial movement involving tens of thousands (some say hundreds of thousands) of people. Members of the movement met in small groups (congregations) called covens averaging 8 to 15 participants.

As the Gardnerian movement spread, three groupings became noticeable. First, one branch followed Gardner's initial impulse and formed covens linked by a lineage of priestesses (a priestess being essential to worship) and worshipping in the nude. Covens gathered twice monthly at the new and full moons, the meetings being called esbats. Second, new covens and associations of covens appeared, which abandoned the necessary female lineage of leadership and worship in the nude. They also explored a variety of alternate worship rituals apart from those originally passed on by Gardner. Third, a group of people emerged calling themselves Pagans rather than witches and using a variety of names for their local groups. In contrast to the two main types of witches, those groups that met as Pagans tended to not hold the esbat meetings every two weeks.

While a few individual groups claimed pre-Gardnerian beginnings, all three groupings shared a common bond in tracing their emergence to the presence of the new energy given to Pagan traditions by Gardner, a focus of worship on a primary female deity (as the main deity of a pantheon that included both male and

female deities), and a worship cycle built around eight evenly placed annual festivals called sabbats.

The eight festivals drew primarily upon what was known of Celtic traditions. They began with the key points in the movements of the sun, the spring and fall equinoxes, and the winter and summer solstices. Halfway between these four days are an additional four days and to which most Witches assign their Celtic names. The equinox and solstice dates are among the most well known in ancient cultures, and the spring equinox especially was unitized as an important benchmark for most ancient calendars. As the Christian church spread into Europe, it tended to adapt Christian worship to Pagan practice both by transforming Pagan festivals into Christian holidays and building Christian churches over the sites of former Pagan worship centers. Many Pagan practices not considered directly antithetical to Christianity were continued either as secular practices in the new Christian societies or even adapted as Christian practices.

In the modern post-Gardnerian revival, the new generation of Wiccans and Pagans adopted a seasonal calendar usually referred to as the wheel of the year. It is built around eight evenly placed holidays:

Samhain (or Hallowe'en), October 31

Yule (Winter Solstice), December 21

Imbolc (or Bridgid or Candlemas), February 2

Eostara (or Lady Day or Spring Equinox), March 21

Beltane (May Day), May 1

Summer Solstice, June 21

Lammas (Lughnasadh), August 1

Mabon (Fall Equinox), September 21

As soon as the movement spread to Australia and New Zealand, where the seasons are reversed, a reworking of the calendar (designed for use in the Northern Hemisphere) had to be made. Different groups made different adjustments to accommodate the opposing seasons and the larger cultural setting.

The year begins at Samhain, on the day when it is believed that the veil between the dead and the living is thin and contact with the dead is easiest. It is a time to remember and celebrate the life of the recently departed and complete their release from earthly ties, and to refocus the living on their plans for the coming year. Because of the larger cultural setting in which the simultaneous Christian celebration of All Hallow's Eve (or Halloween) is tied to medieval images of witches, the days approaching Samhain has been a popular time for Wiccans to make contacts with the media and engage in image building, especially in attempts to distinguish their religion from Christian beliefs about Satan and the practice of Satanism.

Samhain is followed by the winter solstice, in which the dark side on the environment is seen as a metaphor for the dark side (not to be confused with evil) of

human experience, while waiting for the coming light. The following holidays are traditionally tied to the agricultural season, but few modern Pagans are farmers or even rural dwellers. The spring and summer holidays have become times for urban and suburban Wiccans and Pagans to gather outdoors, either with trips to the countryside, with gatherings in parks, or just in one's backyard. While Samhain and Yule are usually times for individual covens to gather, a variety of opportunities for larger gatherings are arranged for the spring and summer. The spring equinox is a time for geographically near covens to meet, while the summer holidays are times for larger Pagan gatherings on a regional or even national and international basis.

The highlight of the year is the summer solstice. The most famous Pagan gathering annually is the Solstice gathering at Stonehenge, the megalithic site in western England. Though historians have debunked any ties between Stonehenge and the ancient Druids, 19th-century hypotheses about the monument having been built by the Druids allowed modern Neo-Druids to claim a connection to the site. Once a year, on June 21, they are allowed access to the site for a dawn ritual (there is also a smaller, less well-known gathering for the winter solstice). Other summer Pagan gatherings are held at Glastonbury and at the stone circle at Avebury. Not especially a pagan gathering, many Pagans attend the Summer festival at Glastonbury which is held annually near, but not on the summer solstice. One of the largest in North America occurs at the rural Wisconsin sanctuary of Circle, a large Pagan association that plays host to sabbat gatherings throughout the year.

The Pagan/Wiccan community presents a small presence within the larger predominantly Christian community. As a whole, the culture does not recognize their holidays, which most often fall on what for most are workdays. It is most common, even in the summer, for Wiccans and Pagans to schedule their holidays on the weekend nearest to the actual holiday.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; Eostara; Fall Equinox; Imbolc; Lammas; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Thelema); Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice; Yule.

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Wigilla. See Epiphany

Willibrord, Saint's Day of St. (November 7)

Willibrord (c. 658–739), a native of Northumbria (northern England just south of Scotland), became a Christian missionary to what is now the Netherlands. He was eventually named the first bishop of Utrecht. His father, a pious man, sent the young Willibrord to the Benedictine abbey at Ripon, York, and he later affiliated with the Benedictine Order. Around 678, he moved to the Abbey at Rathmelisig (Ireland). From there, he was commissioned to travel to Frisia, then nominally under the control of the Franks, and attempt to Christianize the local residents.

The Frankish ruler Pepin (c. 635–714) sent Willibrord to Rome twice, and during the second trip in 695, he was consecrated as a bishop. Upon his return to Frisia, he devoted his life to building the church. He opened a monastery at Utrecht, which subsequently became the site of his cathedral church. In 698, Irmina, the daughter of Dagobert II (c. 650–679), the king of the Franks, gave him an old Roman villa at Echternach, Luxembourg, which he transformed into an abbey. In 714, the Frisian Pagan leader Radbod assumed control of much of the land previously under Pepin's rule, and in the process he undid much of Willibrord's work. After Radbod died, Willibrord was able to restart his mission, this time assisted by Saint Boniface (c. 680–754). When he finally passed away, after many years of work, his body was buried at Echternach.

Willibrord was named a saint soon after his death. In the Church of England, and in the Roman Catholic Church outside of England, his commemoration is on November 7, the anniversary of his death. By order of Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903), Roman Catholics in England commemorate Willibrord on November 29. He is called the Apostle to the Frisians and is a patron saint of the Netherlands.

On Whit Tuesday, the Tuesday after Pentecost, a dancing procession honoring Willibrord takes place in Echternach, Luxembourg. The event begins in the morning at the bridge across the river Sauer. The parish priest delivers a message relevant to the theme of the day. The procession itself is made up of musicians and pilgrims, including some who carry the reliquary of Saint Willibrord, who will travel through the town to the church where Willibrord is buried. The musicians play a traditional melody, while the pilgrims engage in a fairly simple dance step that moves them forward at a slow pace, it taking several hours to cover the distance, around a mile. The procession moves into the church where Willibrord's crypt is located. The proceedings conclude with a Eucharistic service. The dancing step of the procession is somewhat related to the hope of some to attend who have diseases affecting their motor skills—epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, etc.

Willibrord's name and reputation became associated with the Old Catholic movement of the 1870s that was opposed to the declaration of papal infallibility,

as the Diocese of Utrecht was one of the centers that assumed leadership among the Old Catholics.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Boniface of Germany, Saint's Day of St.; Saint Patrick's Day.

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Winter Solstice

The shortest day of the year, the winter solstice was among the earliest astronomical phenomena observed by human cultures that observed the sky and related it to the weather and agricultural seasons. In the Northern Hemisphere, if one observed the rising sun in the fall, it appears to rise a little bit further south day by day until it reaches a point in the last half of December where the southern drift stops. After what appears to be a pause, it begins to rise bit by bit further north each day. In the Southern Hemisphere, the drift is exactly opposite. The winter solstice is the point at which the drift stops and pauses before starting in the opposite direction.

The Julian calendar, adopted in 45 BCE, established December 25 as the winter solstice throughout the Roman Empire. That calendar was officially adopted by the Christian Church in 324 CE as the calendar of Christianity. Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, was set on the 25th of December. In the meantime, the winter solstice gradually drifted due to small inaccuracy in the Julian calendar.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585) made the changes in the calendar to account for the problem in the Julian calendar. The Gregorian revisions mean the northern winter solstice occurs around December 21.

In ancient Rome, the winter solstice was associated with the deity Saturn, the god of agriculture and the harvest. He was also believed to have had oversight of a mythological Golden Age. Rome's winter solstice festival was the Saturnalia, held in his honor. Originally held on December 17, it was gradually expanded as Rome prospered to a weeklong event, during which time war would not be declared, slaves and masters swapped status, prisoners would not be executed, and people gave gifts. In general, people forgot their problems and enjoyed life. The Romans also tended to conflate Saturn with the deity Cronus, the god associated with calendars, seasons, and harvests.

Though no date for the birth of Jesus is given in the New Testament, biblical scholars have frequently noted that events described in the Gospels in association

with Christ's birth, such as shepherds being in the outdoors in the evening, do not support a winter event. Many have suggested that the dating of Christ's birth was affected by the attempt to supplant the Saturnalia with Christmas. Christmas more directly supplanted the Sol Invictus festival, which was added to the calendar in Rome in the later centuries of the empire and was celebrated on December 25. Attributes of the sun god were later applied directly to Jesus.

The winter solstice was celebrated in most ancient cultures, especially in temperate zones. For some it was the middle of winter, and for some the beginning. It would be a time when one batch of wine would have finally fermented, and when some animals would be slaughtered in order to save the food they would consume for human consumption. Most of these celebrations were supplanted by the holy days of the larger world religions, either by absorption or force.

In the modern West, the emergence of Neo-Paganism, a large movement inspired by ancient Pagan practice and belief, has signaled a return of the winter solstice. Neo-Pagans, including their largest segment, the Wiccans, annually celebrate Yule on the winter solstice, and make note of the many practices of ancient Pagans that have been adopted by Christians—Yule logs, Christmas trees, and carol singing.

At the same time, as religious pluralism has increased in predominantly Christian lands, Christmas has developed a prominent secular element, and other religions have emphasized holidays that also occur in close proximity to it. That new emphasis, along with the commercial aspects of Christmas gift giving and the close proximity of New Year's Day the week after Christmas, has contributed to the defining of a winter holiday season in Western society. In this regard, communities of Unbelief, especially Humanists, have revived the winter solstice as an occasion for celebration, and American Humanists have proposed HumanLight Day (December 23) as a day to celebrate humanity and the production of culture with events that include art, music, dancing, storytelling, and candlelight events, and social outreach through developing social awareness, helping the needy, and community involvement. As least one new holiday, Kwanzaa, was created to allow people (in this case, African Americans) who did not want to observe Christmas to have a holiday to celebrate during the winter holiday season.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Christmas; Common Era Calendar; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); Hanukkah; HumanLight; New Year's Day; Summer Solstice; Up Helly Aa.

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World Communion Sunday

World Communion Sunday is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month of October as an act of recognition, primarily within Protestant churches, of the oneness of the Christian community in spite of their denomination divisions. A World Wide Communion Sunday was first proposed and celebrated in several of the larger American Presbyterian denominations (now united in the Presbyterian Church [USA]) in 1936, but had been conceived within the context of the larger ecumenical movement that would soon lead to the formation of the World Council of Churches.

The idea of World Communion Sunday was shared with leaders of other denominations, especially those within the Federal Council of Churches, the major ecumenical organization in the United States at the time, and in 1940, Jesse Bader, the executive secretary of the Council's Department of Evangelism, took the lead in promoting it through the member churches. The celebration was carried on by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, which superseded the Federal Council in 1950. Through its member churches, it was carried to their congregations worldwide and introduced to the member churches of the World Council of Churches.

World Communion Sunday spoke to a prominent problem that had arisen in dialogues on church union. Churches that had some desire to merge were most frequently blocked by differences in their understanding and practice of the Eucharist, frequently termed Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, in which Christians partake sacramentally of the body and blood of Christ. Some Anglicans and Lutherans had a very high doctrine of the Eucharist, while Methodists and Presbyterians had a more spiritualized understanding of the sacrament, and Baptists and free churches replaced the idea of sacrament entirely and celebrated the Lord's Supper as an ordinance and memorial. These differences even prevented very ecumenically minded Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists from celebrating the Eucharist at ecumenical gatherings.

World Communion Sunday avoided the problems that had arisen in union discussions and ecumenical gatherings by proposing that the common element be the day of the celebration rather than an agreement of doctrine of the manner of celebration. Thus, each congregation carries forward with its regular celebration of Holy Communion while recognizing its oneness at an ideal level, with the whole of the divided Christian community. The day has become a major element in the generation of positive attitudes among members of different churches.

While mainly celebrated in Protestant churches, the recognition of World Communion Day has received limited recognition in Catholic and Orthodox churches.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; World Day of Prayer.

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Note: Each participating Christian denomination will create and circulate ephemeral material each year for its member churches.

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World Community Day (November)

World Community Day was initially observed in 1939 as an occasion for women to pray and work for lasting peace and justice in the global society. It was initially observed by women in a variety of Protestant Christian churches, and in 1941, with the formation of the United Council of Church Women (now known as Church Women United), the council assumed responsibility for its sponsorship. Today, World Community Day is most observed by the 24 member denominations of Church Women United, most of whom are also with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

World Community Day is generally observed on the first Friday of November, the weekday being assigned so as to not interfere with regular Sunday congregational activities. As the celebration has spread to Jewish women and beyond, the day may be adjusted locally. Each year, the theme of the day is adopted to focus prayerful attention on a major social concern, with an underlying aim of motivating women to action on the selected issue. World Community Day emerged as the opening shots of World War II were heard, and peace has always been uppermost in its agenda.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Human Rights Day.

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World Day of Prayer (March)

The World Day of Prayer is a global Christian ecumenical event in which women from a broad spectrum of Christian traditions unite for a day of prayer, reflection

on their common bonds, and consideration of their commitment to mission. The event took form in the 1920s, but grew out of the 19th-century struggle of Protestant women to participate in the church's ministry beyond the local church that initially took form in numerous women's auxiliary missionary groups, which raised funds for mission work and brought women together of days of prayer.

By the beginning of the 20th century, women in the United States had become active participants in numerous ecumenical endeavors, and these several trends came together in 1908 with the formation of the Council of Women for Home Missions that assumed responsibility for work with immigrants and organized a joint day of prayer. During 1910 and 1911, women celebrated their decades of missionary activity by organizing a series of speaking engagements across the country that both celebrated and allowed women to experience all that they had achieved in the fields of home and foreign missions and ecumenical endeavors and the manner in which mutual prayer times had empowered them.

World War I and the devastation it wrought further motivated women to action and added the cause of world peace to their agenda. In Canada, some Presbyterian women leaders took the lead in calling for a national Day of Prayer. This led to the formation of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, which in turn sponsored the initial national Day of Prayer in Canada on January 9, 1920.

A parallel effort in the United States led to an initial joint day of prayer for missions on February 20, 1920, the first Friday of Lent. This effort received enthusiastic support across the country and support for the annual event quickly spread through the member churches of the Federal Council of Churches. Within a couple of years, the Canadian women also aligned their prayer day with the first Friday of Lent.

In 1926, the women of North America distributed the outline for the day of prayer to women in countries where their church operated missions. Again, the response seeking participation was enthusiastic, and thus at the beginning of 1927, a national Day of Prayer transformed into the World Day of Prayer for Missions. The next year, at the large International Missionary Conference in Jerusalem, women delegates envisioned the World Day of Prayer as a symbol of their ecumenical bonding. Methodist educator Helen Kim (1899–1970) of Korea was selected to prepare the order of worship for the World Day of Prayer in 1930.

For many years, the administrative duties required to perpetuate the World Day of Prayer was coordinated through Church Women United (and its predecessor organizations) and implemented the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. In 1969, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations decided to align their Day of Prayer with that of Protestant women.

In the new century, the World Day of Prayer has become a more globally focused movement, in line with the larger movement of shifting control for global Christianity from exclusively Western hands. In 2005, the World Day of Prayer USA Committee became one of 170 such committees that now coordinates the

activity of the World Day of Prayer. It was assigned the task of preparing resources for the day, managing the offering received, and distributing the funds.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Common Prayer Day; National Day of Prayer; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; World Peace and Prayer Day.

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World Humanist Day (June 21)

In the 1980s, various Humanist groups and individual leaders began promoting the idea of a World Humanist Day as a means of showcasing Humanism as a positive moral worldview that provides benefits to both individual believers and the surrounding society. The suggestions for the celebration emanated from a variety of sources, and as groups began to observe the day, it was done on different days and lacked a central focus. Some saw the day as a time to promote the work of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. By the end of the decade, both the American Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union passed resolution declaring the summer solstice as the referred day for observing World Humanist Day. At that time, the summer solstice was just beginning to experience a revival of interest among different religious groups in the West, most notably the Neo-Pagans.

Through the 1990s to the present, several groups beyond the American Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union have announced their support of World Humanist Day, including the Council for Secular Humanism, the Campus Freethought Alliance, and the Secular Student Alliance. At the same time, the day has not found widespread support among the larger community, and the majority of local Humanist groups have yet to organize celebrations. Among the reason for the slow acceptance of the day has been the lack of guidance on celebrating the day offered by its supporters.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Darwin Day; Freethought Day; HumanLight.

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World Invocation Day

World Invocation Day is an annual celebratory event proposed by Alice A. Bailey (1880–1949), cofounder with her husband Foster Bailey (1888–1977), of the Arcane School, an organization that grew out of her work as the channel for an evolved Ascended Master named Koot Hoomi (generally known simply as the Tibetan). The Theosophical Society, which Bailey had joined in her early adult years, had proposed the existence of a hierarchy of spiritually evolved individuals, the Ascended Masters, who guided the course of human history and evolution.

In the course of her work expounding the teachings of the Ascended Masters, Bailey proposed the existence of divine energies of love and light that could be accessed by humans during meditation and diffused in the world for the betterment of all. These energies were most accessible during the time of the full moon, and the Arcane School and the several groups which have emerged from it have regularly held gatherings each month on the day of the full moon.

To facilitate the access to, and the reception and diffusion of the divine energies, Bailey also proposed the use of a brief prayer, which she termed the “Great Invocation.”

From the point of Light within the mind of God
Let Light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men—
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth. (<http://www.lucistrust.org/invocation>)

This prayer has been widely distributed, both in pamphlets that offer some basic explanations for its use and on cards with just the simple text printed on them.

While the Great Invocation can be and is used by people at any time, Bailey also proposed three special times when men and women of every spiritual path could together use the Great Invocation to call for light and love and the spiritual direction needed to create a world characterized by justice, unity, and peace. Along with the monthly full moon gatherings of members of the Arcane School, Bailey called for the organization of three major spiritual festivals each spring. The three festivals would occur when the Full Moon was in the astrological sign of Aries (March), Taurus (April), and Gemini (May). The first usually occurs close to the traditional Christian celebration of Easter and the second to the traditional Buddhist celebration of Wesak and are seen as an esoteric celebration of those events. The last has not been associated with a particular holiday of an older faith; it is termed Great Invocation Day.

The theme of the day has been the appeal for the release of the energies that will enable humanity to create a new civilization. The energies released by the intoning of the Great Invocation are for light to illumine the way ahead, love to govern human relationships, and a will to goodness that will guide decision making. The use of the Great Invocation on World Invocation Day is believed to charge the day with deep spiritual significance by building a channel through which spiritual energies can reach the hearts and minds of people globally.

The major gatherings on the evening of the full moon for Great Invocation Day (as well as Easter and Wesak) are held at the three international headquarters of the Arcane School in New York City, London, and Geneva, as well as the centers of the Arcane School and the several groups that derive from it such as Meditation Mount in Ojai, California.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); Wesak/Vesak.

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World Peace and Prayer Day (June 21)

World Peace and Prayer Day is a global observance held annually on June 21 (the summer solstice) as a time to pray for peace and the healing of the Earth.

It originated in 1996 from the suggestion of Chief Arvol Looking Horse of the Lakota Nation, a Native American people. Arvol was responding in part to the birth in 1994 of a white buffalo. There was a tradition among the Lakota that a legendary person named White Buffalo Calf Woman had appeared among the Lakota and imparted to them instruction on living in balance with the earth as well as predicting a time of her return. Arvol believed the birth of a white buffalo calf to be the sign that the predicted time had arrived.

Arvol held a series of ceremonies at various sacred sites designed to bring people who shared concerns about peace and the destruction of the Earth together and to share the message of White Buffalo Calf Woman. The first ceremony took place at Gray Horn Butte in Wyoming, near the site where White Buffalo Calf Woman was believed to have initially appeared. Some 2,000 people, mostly Native Americans, participated. Ceremonies were held in Canada and Minnesota in 1997 and 1998, and then moved to Costa Rica, the site of the University for Peace, in 1999.

With the 2000 ceremony on Lakota land in South Dakota, Arvol felt he had completed the original idea, holding four ceremonies representative of the four directions and then a final ceremony in the center. Subsequently, Arvol turned the idea of the Peace Day over to the larger community and asked them to continue it at other sacred sites around the world. Whether each future celebration occurred at a place of worship or at a significant geographical site considered of spiritual significance, the local residents of the community had accepted the responsibility of continuing the prayers and activities on behalf of world peace.

After the 2000 ceremony, two English representatives approached Arvol with a request to conduct a similar series of ceremonies, this time on four continents with a fifth returning to the Americas. Thus, summer solstice celebrations were held in Ireland (2001); Durban, South Africa (2002); Australia (2003); and Mount Fuji, Japan (2003). In 2005, the ceremony returned to the Black Hills of South Dakota. With a large international contingent at the 2005 gathering, attention was directed to creating a global invitation for people to join in a summer solstice united prayer/meditation to heal the Earth. An effort also was launched to have the United Nations recognize the day as "Honoring Sacred Sites Day." This latter effort was on behalf of Native peoples who wished to protect sacred lands from modern development.

The new directions proposed at the 2005 gathering also led to the need for an organization that could raise the funds to keep the vision alive. Thus, the leadership created the Wolakota Foundation. It is charged with continuing the annual celebrations as well as creating a center with programs for sustaining traditional teachings of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations and researching and demonstrating practices for sustainable, ecologically balanced living. The foundation, based in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, sees its purpose as promoting, protecting, and educating others about the traditional values and wisdom of indigenous people worldwide.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Doukhobor Peace Day; Summer Solstice; World Peace Ceremony.

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World Peace Ceremony (Tibetan Buddhist)

The World Peace Ceremony is the annual celebration of Monlam, the Prayer Blessing Festival, among the most important annual holidays observed by Tibetan Buddhists, held at Bodh Gaya, India, under the sponsorship of the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism. In the 1950s, the Tibetan Buddhist community experienced a trauma as the People’s Republic of China extended its control over the country. Most of its leadership and more than 100,000 lay believers left the country and, through the next decades, slowly began to reestablish themselves in northern India. The exiles engaged in a massive effort to preserve Tibetan culture and religion, build new centers for worship and for the training of monks, and, as much as possible, recreate life as it was in Tibet.

Among the monks who moved into exile was the venerable Tarthang Tulku, a Nyingma lama who moved to Berkeley, California, and founded the Nyingma Meditation Center. By the 1980s, the center had prospered and become an important focus of the preservation of the Tibetan tradition outside of Tibet. Thus, in the 1980s, Tarthang Tulku turned some attention to the situation in Bodh Gaya, an important site for Buddhists as the place where Gautama Buddha had experienced his enlightenment, the seminal event in the origin of the faith. Over the centuries, as Buddhism died out in India, the site had been lost, and through the 20th century, a movement had developed to recover the site and make it into a major Buddhist pilgrimage center. A major step in that regard was taken in 1949 when control of the site was turned over to a new management committee. Though still under Hindu control, Buddhists have remained participants in the committee.

As part of the effort to develop Bodh Gaya, and simultaneously assist the revival of the Tibetan community-in-exile, Tarthung Tulku, in 1989, sponsored the first annual World Peace Ceremony. This event was, to the Tibetan Buddhists who attended a celebration of the annual Monlam or Prayer Blessing festival, an important annual event on the Tibetan Buddhist calendar. The Monlam celebration happened to coincide with the annual Hindu national festival of Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and the largest annual holiday in both India and Nepal. The ceremony brought together exiled leaders from the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The idea of the World Peace Ceremony as an appropriate celebration of Monlam caught on among the attending lamas, and they returned annually and began to envision its expansion to the other sites associated with the Buddha. Thus in 1993, the Sakya and Kagyu Buddhists began to sponsor a Monlam/World

Peace Ceremony at Lumbini, where the Buddha was born, and then the Gelugpa School accepted responsibility for the celebrations at Sarnath, where the Buddha began his public ministry and preached his first sermon.

The development of the World Peace Ceremony celebrations has left the original event at Bodh Gaya as primarily a gathering for the various sub-schools of the Nyingma tradition, though its observance regularly includes a visit from the Dalai Lama, who will make several stops in India throughout the week of Monlam.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Diwali; Doukhobor Peace Day; Monlam, the Great Prayer Festival; Nehan; Wesak/Vesak; World Peace and Prayer Day.

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World Religion Day (January)

World Religion Day, observed worldwide on the third Sunday of January each year, is a Bahá'í-inspired idea that has taken on a life of its own. In 2009, for instance, the Halifax (Nova Scotia) Regional Municipality in Canada celebrated its sixth annual World Religion Day in the Cathedral of All Saints, in recognition of which the mayor and councilors of the Halifax Regional Municipality issued a proclamation. In 2007, at the World Religion Day event hosted by the Entebbe Municipal Council of Entebbe, Uganda (situated on the northern shores of Lake Victoria), participating religious leaders signed a joint declaration to establish the Entebbe Inter-Faith Coalition. The signatories pledged to use “the unifying power of religion to instill in the hearts and minds of all people of faith the fundamental facts and spiritual standards that have been laid down by our Creator to bring them together as members of one family.”

World Religion Day, now observed internationally, originated among American Bahá'ís. Its history dates back to 1949, when the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (the national Bahá'í governing council) instituted an annual World Religion Day “to be observed publicly by the Bahá'í Communities wherever possible throughout the United States.” The third Sunday of January each year was designated for this celebration, and the first World Religion Day event took place on January 15, 1950.

The Bahá'í Faith, among the younger of the independent world religions, emphasizes unity in the human community, and the inauguration of World Religion Day seemed a natural expression and extension of the Bahá'í focus on the unity of religions, races, and nations. However, this was not the exclusive, nor even the primary original purpose of World Religion Day. In 1968, the Universal

House of Justice, the international Bahá'í governing body established in 1963, wrote:

Your letter of September 30, with the suggestion that “there should be one day in the year in which all of the religions should agree” is a happy thought, and one which persons of good will throughout the world might well hail. However, this is not the underlying concept of World Religion Day, which is a celebration of the need for and the coming of a world religion for mankind, the Bahá'í Faith itself. Although there have been many ways of expressing the meaning of this celebration in Bahá'í communities in the United States, the Day was not meant primarily to provide a platform for all religions and their emergent ecumenical ideas. In practice, there is no harm in the Bahá'í communities' inviting the persons of other religions to share their platforms on this Day, providing the universality of the Bahá'í Faith as the fulfillment of the hopes of mankind for a universal religion are clearly brought forth. (Lights of Guidance, no. 1710)

On April 2002, the Universal House of Justice issued a letter “To the World’s Religious Leaders,” in which interfaith dialogue is highly regarded. However, the letter states that the initiatives of the interfaith movement of the previous century “lack both intellectual coherence and spiritual commitment.” For its part, “the Bahá'í community has been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities from the time of their inception” and will continue to assist, valuing the “cherished associations” that these activities create. It continued: “We owe it to our partners in this common effort, however, to state clearly our conviction that interfaith discourse, if it is to contribute meaningfully to healing the ills that afflict a desperate humanity, must now address honestly . . . the implications of the over-arching truth . . . that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.”

While neither the Universal House of Justice nor the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States currently plays an active role in promoting World Religion Day events, the Bahá'í International Community (an official organ of the Universal House of Justice) has consistently reported on such events, with obvious appreciation. In the United States, the timing of World Religion Day now conflicts with Martin Luther King, Jr., Day (the third Monday in January), observed for the first time on January 20, 1986. While this has led to the discontinuance of World Religion Day in many locales, some Bahá'í communities integrate the two days, while others may hold their World Religion Day events a few days earlier.

This, in brief, is how and why World Religion Day has subsequently taken on a life of its own. There are several outstanding examples of this. On January 20, 2007, in Brazzaville, the Congo Republic became the second country to issue a postage stamp for World Religion Day. Featuring a globe surrounded by the symbols of 11 religions, the stamp bears a French superscription which, translated, reads: “God is the source of all religions.” Following a World Religion Day

program that drew more than 250 participants from eight faith-communities, agents were present to sell both the stamps and first-day covers. In 1985, Sri Lanka had become the first country to issue a World Religion Day stamp.

The purpose of World Religion Day today is to highlight the essential harmony of the world's religions, to foster their transconfessional affinity through interfaith ecumenism, and to promote the idea and ideal of world unity in which the world's religions can play a potentially significant role. This generalization is based on observations of how World Religion Day is celebrated in events that are sponsored by organizations that are not Bahá'í, whether in concert with local Bahá'í sponsorship or entirely independent of it. (In most cases, the Bahá'ís continue to play a vital role in the orchestration and success of these events.) The day is celebrated with interfaith dialogue, conferences, and other events that advance not only mutual understanding (or what scholars call "spiritual literacy"), but recognition, respect, and reciprocity among the followers of all religions who join together in celebrating World Religion Day.

Where observed, World Religion Day events typically do not attract representatives and participants from all local faith-communities, primarily for religious reasons. As such, World Religion Day provides an insightful social barometer of the extent to which various religious groups are willing to formally associate with each other

While World Religion Day events are still sponsored and cosponsored by local members of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide, an increasing number of World Religion Day events are independently organized by interfaith or multi-faith coalitions. For instance, in Tralee, Ireland, the local World Religion Day observance was organized by the Kerry Diocesan Justice, Peace and Creation Committee, a member organization of Pax Christi International in Ireland. In 2009, the third annual observance of World Religion Day in Greensboro, North Carolina, was organized by FaithAction and the Piedmont Interfaith Council. Also in 2009, World Religion Day was celebrated by Vadamalayan Hospitals and Vadamalayan Institute of Paramedical Sciences, in which a quiz competition was held to mark the occasion.

In certain cases, civic governments, both national and local, have recognized the positive social value of World Religion Day events. In 2004, the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky proclaimed January 17–18, 2004, as "World Religion Weekend" and went on to "urge the Commonwealth's citizens to participate in the observance of World Religion Weekend." In 2007, the Republic of Ghana's Ghana@50 Secretariat organized a symposium themed "The Unity of the Faiths" on World Religion Day on Sunday, February 18, 2007. In January 2008, the City Council of Duncan, British Columbia, Canada, proclaimed January 20, 2008, as World Religion Day. In a 2009 World Religion Day event in Australia, the parliamentary secretary for multicultural affairs and settlement services, Laurie Ferguson, said: "Interfaith dialogue plays an important role in increasing understanding of our nation's religious and cultural diversity and bringing Australians closer together. The Australian Government supports interfaith dialogue at the highest levels." Many World Religion Day events are associated with mayoral or municipal proclamations.

World Religion Day is self-perpetuating, thanks to the initiatives of progressive individuals and institutions who share a vision of religious confraternity. It is an inspired idea, with widespread appeal and remarkable longevity.

Christopher Buck

See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Ascension of; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of.

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Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa (January 5)

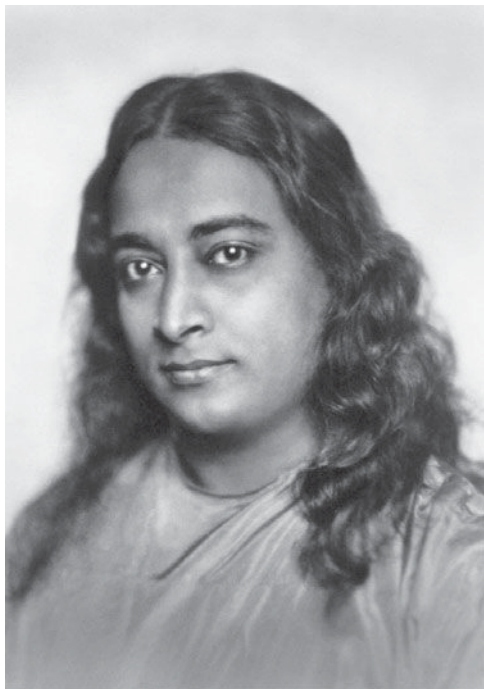
Paramahansa Yogananda was an Indian teacher known as the founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship and a pioneer Hindu teacher in the West. He was born in 1893, in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India. As a youth, he began a spiritual search that led him to the person who became his teacher (guru), Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855–1936)

Sri Yukteswar initiated Sri Yogananda in 1915 into the renounced life as a sann-yasin and introduced him to kriya yoga. In 1920, Paramahansa Yogananda started his mission in the West, coming to the United States at the invitation of the Unitarian-sponsored International Association for Religious Freedom. He remained in the United States and founded what became the Self-Realization Fellowship to disseminate the teachings of Kriya Yoga.

In 1935, Swami Sri Yukteswar recognized his accomplishments and mastery of the tradition by giving the title Paramahansa (literally, “supreme swan”) to Yogananda. From his base in southern California, he built a national following through the use of lessons that he mailed out to students. His *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) became a classic of Hindu literature in the West. Yogananda died on March 7, 1952, and his living quarters at the fellowship’s headquarters in Encinitas, California, were subsequently turned into a shrine to him.

Paramahansa Yogananda’s birthday has become an annual event and a time to remember the fellowship’s founder. Celebrations are held in the fellowship churches and centers around the world, usually with a gathering of friends and members in the evening. The worship service will include prayers, chants, readings from Yogananda’s many writings, and meditation. Those who attend are asked to bring a flower, which is used in a brief ritual as a symbol of devotion to him. Attendees also make an offering as an expression of loyalty to the fellowship.

This tradition is also carried on within the Center for Spiritual Awareness, led by former fellowship minister Roy Eugene Davis, and the Ananda Church of Self-Realization, founded by Swami Kriyananda, formerly a prominent leader in the Self-Realization Fellowship. In recent years, Ananda has also sponsored a two-day event the weekend prior to the actual birthday commemoration that has allowed a more in-depth exploration and appropriation of Yogananda’s teachings. The Weekend, held in Nevada City, California, includes movies of Yogananda, a tour of a museum with relics of him and the other masters in his lineage, meditation, chanting, and shared meals. Attendees are invited to turn the time between



Paramahansa Yogananda. (Ananda.org)

the weekend and the actual birthday celebration on January 5 into a personal retreat at the churches mountain facilities.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Babaji Commemoration Day; Yogananda, Mahasamadhi of Paramahansa; Yukteswar, Commemorative Days of Swami Sri.

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Yogananda, Mahasamadhi of Paramahansa (March 7)

Paramahansa Yogananda, an Indian spiritual teacher known for founding the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), pioneered the development of Hinduism in the West. He was born in 1893, and in 1920, he accepted an invitation from the Unitarian-sponsored International Association for Religious Freedom to come to the United States. He spent the rest of his life in the United States as a teacher, author, and the spiritual head of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF).

He spent the last years of his life largely in seclusion. He worked to complete some writings, most notably his commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and the Christian Gospels in the New Testament, and final revisions of the lessons taken by all SRF members. Yogananda died (spoken of as entering *mahasamadhi*) on March 7, 1952. Subsequently, the fellowship's headquarters in Encinatas, California, preserved his living quarters there as a shrine to him. Members of the SRF note that after his death, his body manifested no signs of physical disintegration, which the morticians noted as a most unusual occurrence.

Yogananda is remembered by the SRF and by a number of other groups which have derived from it, most notably the Ananda Church of Self-Realization. All of the Yogananda-oriented groups gather on March 7, the anniversary of his passing, with a service of commemoration that includes meditation, chanting,

messages about and Yogananda, reading from his writings. The Ananda church has made much of Yogananda's promise to return to his disciples, about which he wrote a drama, which is occasionally performed on the anniversary of his mahasamadhi. Attendees are asked to bring a flower and a love offering to the service.

In 1977, on the 25th anniversary of Paramahansa Yogananda's death, the Government of India issued a commemorative stamp in his honor.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Babaji Commemoration Day; Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa; Yuktswar, Commemorative Days of Swami Sri.

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Yom HaAtzmaut

Yom HaAtzmaut is one of four new holidays (including Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom Yerushalayim) proposed for the Jewish community since the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948. It is celebrated on the fifth of the Hebrew month of Iyar (but occasionally moved if it conflicts with the Sabbath). Yom HaAtzmaut celebrates the founding of Israel and is closely tied to Yom HaZikaron, the memorial day for the soldiers who lost their life in the effort to secure an independent Israel. The official end of Yom HaZikaron and beginning of Yom HaAtzmaut occurs shortly after sundown during a ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, in which the flag of Israel that had been set at half-mast in acknowledgment of the fallen soldiers is raised to the top of the flagpole.

Yom HaAtzmaut would appear to be primarily a secular holiday, but given the intimate connection of Jewish religious commitments to and beliefs about Israel, it was inevitable that Yom HaAtzmaut would acquire its religious aspect. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel (which represents the Orthodox community) has declared that Hallel (the psalms of praise found in Psalms 113–118) be read in morning services as is done on other joyous holidays, and including the reading of a special *haftarah* (prophetic portion).

Those ultra-Orthodox Jews who have rejected the general perspective of Zionism and the formation of the state of Israel do not celebrate this day. On the other end of the spectrum, some rabbis have argued for the close association of Yom HaAtzmaut with Hanukkah and Purim, as each of these commemorate a "miraculous" victory of Jewish forces over an enemy of seemingly superior

military strength. The Modern Orthodox Kibbutz Movement has, for example, proposed a version of the prayer *Al HaNissim* (“Concerning the Miracles”) to be added to the *Amidah* (the central prayer recited while standing) on Yom HaAtzmaut, as is done on Hanukkah and Purim, and both the Masorti (Conservative) and the Progressive (Reform) congregations in Israel accepted this suggestion.

Most of the Jewish communities in the West have incorporated a celebration of Israel’s independence into their annual holiday calendar, but consider it a strictly secular affair, to show solidarity with Israel. Meanwhile, the celebration in Israel has been focused in the events on the evening as the day begins (a new day always begins at sunset on the Israeli calendar). Israel’s president address the country’s armed forces, whose representatives then march in a parade on Mount Herzl. Following the parade, there is a torch-lighting ceremony acknowledging the country’s achievements in all spheres of life. During the next day, the Israel Prize awards are given to individuals for their contributions to the country.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Hanukkah; Purim; Yom HaShoah; Yom HaZikaron; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Yom HaShoah

Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) is a Jewish commemoration day dedicated to the remembrance of the Holocaust, the destruction of some six million Jews that began with the rise to power of the National Socialist Party (the Nazis) in Germany in the 1930s and reached its zenith in the last years of World War II with the development of the gas chambers in the several death camps, most notably Auschwitz in Poland. Shoah is a Hebrew word meaning catastrophe or utter destruction.

Yom HaShoah is held on the 27th of Nissan (which occurs in late April or early May on the Common Era calendar) and is an official holiday in Israel. In 2005, the United Nations designated January 27 as the international Holocaust Memorial Day, and that date is acknowledged in most of the countries of the European Union. Neither day is recognized in the United States, but the Jewish community and many in the Christian community hold a commemoration on or near Nissan 27.

As a relatively new day of commemoration, not only has no date been agreed upon by all, but there is not set ritual. Many will light candles, often six candles symbolic of the six million who died, though much more emphasis is placed upon holding some form of commemoration rather than the form that the observance will take. In Israel, a siren will sound at which point everyone stops any activity in which they are engaged. Integral to the day is the retelling the stories of what people experienced. The United Kingdom first celebrated a Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2001, the year following the opening of a permanent Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum.

In 1994, following the release of *Schindler's List* (1993), director Steven Spielberg formed the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (now the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education) to record and preserve video testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust. The foundation concentrated on documenting the stories of Jewish survivors, but also interviewed other victims including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, and a variety of others who had knowledge of the events. By the end of the 1990s, the archive (since 2006 housed at the University of Southern California) included some 52,000 video testimonies offered by people from 56 different countries.

The Holocaust began with a campaign of anti-Semitism by the Nazis and accompanying acts of violence and destruction. Once Adolf Hitler came to power, plans were put in place to eradicate various segments of the population, including homosexuals and Gypsies, but most notably the Jews. In the end, the Nazis adopted a policy, termed the "Final Solution," that looked toward the complete annihilation of the Jews from all of Europe. Systematically, Jews were confined to overcrowded ghettos, then sent to concentration camps, and as additional countries were overrun, sent to death camps. By the time the Nazi regime was brought down, two-thirds of Europe's Jews had been killed.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Common Era Calendar; Yom HaAtzmaut; Yom HaZikaron; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Yom HaZikaron

Yom HaZikaron is one of four new holidays proposed to the Jewish community in the wake of the formation of the modern state of Israel (the others being Yom HaShoah, Yom HaAatzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim). Yom HaZikaron is intimately tied to Yom HaAatzmaut, the celebration of the formation of the state of Israel, and is held the day before on the fourth day of the Hebrew month of Iyar. In contrast to the joyous celebration of Yom HaAatzmaut, Yom HaZikaron is a somber occasion, memorializing those soldiers who have died initially in the battles leading to independence and subsequently to defend it in the years since 1948. For the majority of the Israeli population, Israel's several wars remain a vivid memory.

Within the religious community, special prayers to the evening prayer service have been added for Yom HaZikaron. Also, a special *yizkor* (remembrance) prayer and a memorial prayer for deceased members of the Israeli Defense Forces is included as part of the Yom HaZikaron ceremonies.

For most, the secular patriotic aspect of Yom HaZikaron dominates the day. The most widely recognized commemoration follows the air raid siren that is sounded twice—at the beginning of the day, and immediately prior to the public recitation of prayers in military cemeteries. At these moments, activity ceases, and all pause to acknowledge the sacrifice of those who died defending the country.

Numerous public ceremonies are held throughout Israel, and the day concludes with a national ceremony at the military cemetery on Mount Herzl. The day will officially end there shortly after sundown, when the flag, which had been lowered to half-mast, is raised to the top of the flag pole and the celebration of Independence Day (Yom HaAatzmaut).

Yom HaZikaron is not widely observed outside of Israel.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Tisha B'Av; Yom HaAatzmaut; Yom HaShoah; Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), possibly the single most observed holy day in the Jewish year, is one of two Jewish holidays not related to a specific historical event in Jewish memory (as are, for example, Passover or Purim). Like Rosh Hashanah, it is related primarily to the commandment of God for an annual act of atonement. It occurs on the 10th day of the month of Tishri in the Jewish calendar and follows over a month of preparation that began on the first day of Elul, the previous month. During the month of Elul, one begins to think about the issues of self-reflection, repentance, and atonement for one's failings, and begins to bring one's consciousness and behavior into a repentant mode. This preparation leads to Rosh Hashanah, the Day of the Shofar Blast or the Jewish New Year, which kicks off the High Holy Days. The High Holy Days are seen as a time of concentrated self-reflection and repentance, and for special acts of charity and forgiveness. Following Rosh Hashanah, the Days of Awe lead to the Day of Atonement in which God seals His judgment for the coming year.

The observance of Yom Kippur is mandated in Leviticus 23: 26–32:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: Howbeit on the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; there shall be a holy convocation unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no manner of work in that same day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from his people. And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any manner of work in that same day, that soul will I destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be unto you a sabbath of solemn rest, and ye shall afflict your souls; in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye keep your sabbath.

On Rosh Hashanah, believers think of God writing a judgment upon them relative to their behavior and motivations over the previous year. The succeeding Days of Awe are a time to reflect upon the past year, seek forgiveness, and make amends. The Day of Atonement represents one last chance to change the judgment of God in one's favor before the day ends, and God seals His judgment for the coming year. That judgment heralds one's prosperity, happiness, and even life or death for the coming year.

Yom Kippur is observed as a Sabbath. One refrains from all work. It is also a day of fasting, with no food or drink beginning shortly before sunset and continuing for the next 25 hours. Additional restrictions punctuating the uniqueness of the day include refraining from washing and bathing, not using cosmetics products

such as deodorants, wearing shoes made of something other than leather (like canvas sneakers), and of course, refraining from sexual relations. Many people will dress in white.

Most of Yom Kippur is spent in communal prayer in the synagogue, there being five services. The first service at sundown on the eve of Yom Kippur begins the start of the fast; the last ends at nightfall the next day, and concludes the fast with the *shofar* (ram's horn) sounded in a final long blast. Part of the Yom Kippur liturgy is a lengthy and broadly worded confession of the sins of the community, with an emphasis on sins that were detrimental to one's neighbor, acts of both omission and commission.

Yom Kippur is a public holiday in Israel. Radio and television stations cease broadcasting; airports and other public transportation shut down; and all businesses, including restaurants, close. In Israel, even many, who consider themselves irreligious Jews fast and avoid using prohibited transportation and communication systems. Soldiers seek leave to be with their families for the day.

In 1973, well aware of Israel's vulnerability on this, the most sacred day on the Jewish calendar, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. As radios, which had been silent, began calling up the reserves and soldiers left their prayers to return to their units, Israel retreated before the advancing Egyptian and Syrian armies. However, within a few days, Israel recovered and fought the war to a point that victory seemed imminent before a cease-fire went into effect.

By 2008, 63 percent of the Israeli public said they planned to fast on Yom Kippur, the great majority for religious reasons. A third, who did not intend to fast, did not plan to flaunt openly the traditional observance of the holy day.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Days of Awe; Rosh Hashanah.

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Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day)

In the last half of the 20th century, four holidays were added to the Jewish calendar (Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, Yom HaAtzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim). The most recently added date commemorates the unification of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty as a result of the Six Day War (1967). Jerusalem Day is observed on the 28th day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, approximately six weeks after Passover and a week before Shavuot.

The Six Day War gained added significance for most Jews in that for the first time in more than 2,000 years, the entire city of Jerusalem was under Jewish sovereignty. The Israeli army assumed control over the eastern part of the city on the third day of the War, and shortly thereafter, an official unification of the two sections of the city took place.

In the wake of the reunification and the declaration of the new holiday, The Chief Rabbinate of Israel (representing Orthodox Jewry) declared that this day should be observed with the recital of Hallel (the recitation of Psalms 113–118) during the morning service. The Progressive or Reform Jews have made a similar suggestion, while the Conservative Jews have made alternative suggestions of additional readings for the day. Some of the ultra-Orthodox Jews, who have maintained an anti-Zionist perspective, have not acknowledged Yom Yerushalayim as a holiday.

For many Israeli Jews, including many secular Jews, Jerusalem Day has become a day to travel to Jerusalem to show their solidarity with the idea of a united city and with the government in charge of it. Given the lack of approval of the unification by much of the international community, demonstrations of approval of the ending of the segregation instituted in 1948 when the Israeli state was formed is important for the government authorities. The government has responded to its own declaration of Jerusalem Day by using the day preceding it as an opportunity to educate the population on the city's heritage.

Yom Yerushalayim is not, as of the first decade of the new century, observed by the majority of Jews outside of Israel. Many non-Israeli Jews remain conflicted about the manner in which the city was united and the future of the many Arabs still residing in the city.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fast of Gedaliah; Yom HaAtzmaut; Yom HaShoah; Yom HaZikaron.

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Yukteswar, Commemorative Days of Swami Sri (March 9, May 10)

Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855–1936) was an Indian spiritual teacher who became known in the West initially as the teacher (guru) of Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952). He was born Priya Nath Karar near Calcutta and married as a young man. His wife died giving birth to their daughter. Shortly thereafter, in 1883, he was initiated into the practice of kriya yoga by Lahiri Mahasaya. As he mastered the discipline, he authored a book (*The Holy Science*) that appeared in 1894. He was later initiated into the renounced life as a sannyasin.

Yukteswar seems to have met Yogananda about 1912 and, several years later, initiated him as a sannyasin. Yogananda moved to the United States in 1920, and originally set up what was to become the Self-Realization Society as a branch of Sri Yukteswar's organization in India. Yukteswar died in India on March 9, 1936.

Centers of the Self-Realization Fellowship and the several organizations derived from it hold commemorations of both the birthday and death day of Sri Yukteswar. Members and friends will gather in the evening for a special service that will include meditation, chanting, reading from Sri Yukteswar's writings, and a common meal. Attendees are asked to bring a flower and an offering for participation in the ritual.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Yogananda, Birthday of Paramahansa; Yogananda, Mahasamadhi of Paramahansa.

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Yule

Yule is the midwinter celebration of the modern Pagan and Wiccan community. That community, though now quite diverse, grew primarily out of the effort of

Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964) to create a new Goddess-oriented religion, which he saw as a continuation of ancient practice in Europe before the arrival of Christianity. Many of the elements of Yule survived as Christianity became the dominant religion and integrated as much of Pagan practice that did not directly contradict the faith into its life. The contemporary use of a slow-burning Yule log and holly derive from Yule. The holiday was also celebrated for 12 days, and there is some reason to conclude that the Christian calendar's setting 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany reflects earlier Pagan practice.

Yule was primarily a festival among the Germanic people, a time to break the boring patterns of winter's existence and gather for storytelling—hero tales being popular items for retelling—and to dream about life in the coming spring and summer.

In the modern world, in which Pagans and Wiccans remain a small minority, Yule has joined the growing list of midwinter celebrations proposed by those who do not celebrate the dominant Christmas season. Many Pagans draw upon modern historical knowledge of the ancient Roman festival to the sun god, which even many Christians now acknowledge as the rationale for the dating of Christmas near the winter solstice (a date that drifted due to inaccuracies with the Julian calendar). Pagans celebrate Yule on the winter solstice, December 21.

For modern Pagans, Yule comes as the amount of daily sunlight is at its least and weather is cold, with several months of more cold ahead. However, they see it as a time to note that the sun has traveled to the Southern Hemisphere, is now beginning its journey back, and will soon bring the spring and summer. The giving of gifts has been added to Yule, an accommodation to Christmas primarily for the children.

Most Yule celebrations/rituals are done in the small groups (covens, groves, nests) around which Wiccans and Pagans are organized.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Beltane; Christmas; Eostara; Fall Equinox; Festival of Light (Rosicrucian); HumanLight; Imbolc; Lammas; Samhain; Spring Equinox (Vernal); Summer Solstice; Winter Solstice.

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Z

Zaccheus Sunday

Zaccheus is a New Testament character whom Jesus meets briefly as he traveled through Jericho. He was a wealthy man, largely despised by the Judeans because he collected taxes for the occupying Romans, but he had heard of Jesus and wanted to catch a glimpse of him.

And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature. And he ran on before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said unto him, “Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.”

And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold.”

And Jesus said unto him, “To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:3–10)

After this brief encounter, Zaccheus dropped out of the biblical text as swiftly as he had entered it. Biblical commentators have seen Zaccheus as someone who went out his way to meet Jesus, who showed humility, and eventually repented of his sins as a result of this encounter.

In the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches, a Lenten fast is held for seven weeks before the celebration of Holy week and Easter. In addition to Lent, there is a three-week preparation for the coming Great Lenten fast. The Sunday prior to that three-week preparation is the Sunday in which the gospel text is Luke 19: 1–10, the story of Zaccheus. Hence the name, Zaccheus Sunday. It begins the annual cycle of worship centered on Easter. It occurs on a different day every year, but is always 11 weeks before Easter.

Though Zaccheus was a relatively minor character in the New Testament, over the centuries, various writers supplied additional biographical details concerning his life. Clement of Alexander (c. 150–c. 215) identified him with Matthias, the person chosen to join the Apostles after Judas committed suicide (Acts 1:21–26).

In other traditions, he was identified as the first bishop of Caesarea, a city located south of present-day Haifa, Israel.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Easter; Lazarus Saturday; Lent.

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Zarathustra, Commemorative Days of (March 26, December 26)

The Prophet Zarathustra or Zoroaster was the founder of the Zoroastrian faith. One of the earliest religious leaders known to have existed, he is often cited as contemporaneous with Moses. In fact, little is known of Zoroaster's life, which scholars have placed as early as the sixth century BCE and as recently as the 16th century. He is generally associated with Bactria, a land that included parts of present-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Many different groups have their own stories of Zarathustra and suggest that he was of their tribe.

He flourished in what is now eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan and centered his teachings on the existence of one creator God, named Ahura Mazda or "Lord Wisdom." Some speculate on his life from an analysis of the Gathas, holy books incorporated into the Zoroastrian sacred scripture, the Avesta. The Denkard, another part of the Avesta, a part written last, contains a brief biography of Zarathustra, but it appears to be more legendary than historical in content.

Little is also known of the end of Zarathustra's life. Different sources suggest that he died peacefully in his sleep, while others state that he was murdered. Others suggest that he was in the temple, possibly killed there by an invading army.

Contemporary Zoroastrians have commemorated Zoroaster on two dates: his birth on March 26, and his death on December 26. No one knows the date of Zoroaster's birth (known as Khordad Sal) or death, but on March 26 (in late August or early September in India), and December 26 (late May or early June in India), believers will organize gatherings at which prayers are recited and speeches centered on the life and teachings of Zoroaster are delivered. March 26 is just a few days after the Zoroastrian New Year (Nowruz), and revelers will often simply continue the New Year's celebration for several days and conclude it on March 26. On each occasion, Zoroastrians will visit one of their fire temples if possible. Non-Zoroastrians are not invited to these gatherings, as they are not allowed in

the temple. Zarthost No Deeso, as Zoroaster's death day is known in India, prompts observances especially in Mumbai and in the state of Gujarat.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fravardegan; Gahambars; Nowruz; Zoroastrianism.

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Zartusht-no-diso (December 26)

The birth and death dates of Zarathustra (or Zoroaster), the founder of the Zoroastrian faith, are a matter of intense debate. While some place his life as early as the fifth millennium BCE, the more commonly accepted date is during the second millennium BCE. It is believed that he came from what is now Kazakhstan, where the modern Iranian people originated. After he influenced a tribal chief named Vishtaspa, the Iranians carried Zarathustra's teachings with them into northeastern Iran around the 12th century BCE. From there, it spread among the Medes and Persians. In the sixth century BCE, during the reign of Cyrus the Great (559–530 BCE), it reached a new zenith as the Persian Empire encompassed a land from Turkey to Afghanistan. Zoroastrianism remained a powerful force in the Middle East until the emergence of Islam in the seventh century and the overrunning of those countries previously dominated by Zoroastrianism by Muslim forces.

While becoming a minority religion even in Iran, Zoroastrianism has survived, primarily in Iran and India; but it has spread to the West, and small communities now exist in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. The total global community has been reduced to between 100,000 and 200,000.

Zarathustra died at the age of 77, though how he died has been a matter of conjecture. Zoroastrian tradition suggests that he may have been killed while praying in the sanctuary by a foreign enemy of the king in whose court he served. Other traditions believe that he died peacefully.

Zartusht-no-diso is the day in the Zoroastrian sacred calendar designated for worshippers to remember the death of Zarathustra. On that day, special prayers are recited, and believers make a visit to the temple to mark the anniversary.

J. Gordon Melton



Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, is credited with founding Zoroastrianism, though little more is known about him. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

take note of a new star. In ancient Persia, large pyramidal structures called ziggurats were erected from which the Zoroastrian priests could make their astronomical/astrological observations.

Zoroastrianism is named for Zarathustra (or Zoroaster). Little is known about Zarathustra, including the years in which he lived. The best estimate is that he came from that area of modern Kazakhstan east of the Volga River from which the Iranian people originated. It is believed that he influenced a tribal chief named Vishtaspa in his favor, and that his faith was then carried among the Iranians when they moved into northeastern Iran around the 12th century BCE. Zarathustra may have lived as early as the 17th century. From that base, Zoroastrianism spread among the Medes and Persians in western Iran.

During the reign of Cyrus the Great (559–530 BCE), an empire was created that extended from Turkey to Afghanistan. Under Cyrus, Zoroastrianism moved from its prehistorical to its historical phase, when Cyrus made it the empire's state religion. By this time, the ziggurats were in place, as were the Magi, originally the priestly class from the Medes. The life of Zoroastrianism was completely disrupted during the conquests of Alexander the Great. Among other actions in subduing the land, Alexander burned Persepolis, the capital, and in the process destroyed many Zoroastrian records and writings. Then, in the name of spreading Hellenistic culture, his successors suppressed Zoroastrianism until a new Persian Empire was finally created toward

See also Zarathustra, Commemoration Day of; Zoroastrianism.

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■ Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Persia (Iran), is most known in the West from the biblical story told of the Magi visiting the child Jesus (Matthew 2). The wise men known for their searching the heavens for signs were Zoroastrians who would

the end of the second century BCE. The Parthian Empire (c. 129–224) reestablished the primacy of Zoroastrianism, which it enjoyed through successive regimes until the coming of the Arabs and Islam in the seventh century. For the next centuries, Zoroastrianism would battle Islam for the hearts of the people, and by the 10th century, it had become not only the state religion, but also the dominant religion practiced across the Persian lands.

The dislodging of the Zoroastrian leaders from the Persian court became the motivation for some to begin the migration to what was perceived as a less hostile land, and early in the eighth century, migrations to western India began. They became the nucleus of the Parsee (or Persian) Zoroastrian community, which from India has now spread to Africa and the West.

Zarathustra preached a dualistic understanding of the universe. In it, two forces fight for the hearts of humans. Ahura Mazda, the eternal God, is wise, good, and just, but unfortunately, not omnipotent. There also exists a second entity, Angra Mainyu, like Ahura Mazda uncreated, but the embodiment of evil. In order to defeat Angra Mainyu, Ahura Mazda created the world, which exists as a battleground between the good and the bad. To assist him in the creative act, he called upon his Holy Spirit and evoked the Holy Immortals, all emanations of the one God. His emanations are, however, properly seen as divine, and as such are objects of veneration and even worship. Each of these seven emanations represents a high value, such as truth, health, or power. Zoroastrians should invite these Holy Immortals into their lives and make these qualities/values their own.

In the cosmic battle, Angra Mainyu brought evil spirits to oppose the Holy Immortals, some pictured as gods of war. They brought death into the world. The good spirit countered evil by bringing more life into existence to replace those who have died. Individuals are called through their life to align with good or evil, and will be judged at the end by which choices they made.

Humans have an important role in the cosmic battle. Collectively, they have the power to align with good and become the decisive force in the ultimate triumph of goodness. Then, at the end of earthly life, each person will be judged; those who were more good than bad will go to a heavenly existence, and the others are destined for hell and punishment. Although the dominant form of Zoroastrianism looked for the gradual triumph of good over evil and the eventual destruction of the evil order, a second form of understanding the end-time, an apocalyptic system, also developed. In that second presentation, evil would gradually win, with an accompanying increase in chaos, natural disasters, and social ills. The inevitable growth of evil would at the last moment be halted by the appearance of a Saoshyant, a Savior figure who will appear out of the family of Zarathustra to lead a final battle of good people triumphing over the evil one. The dead will then be resurrected and the final judgment will take place. At that time, the evil will be destroyed and the good purged of the remaining evil they possess. The good will enjoy eternal life. The correlations of this form of Zoroastrianism with later Christian perspectives are obvious.

The Zoroastrian cosmology is derived from its scripture, the Avesta, a volume of approximately 1,000 pages. The oldest part of the Avesta consists of the Gathas, the hymns of Zarathustra, which are written in an ancient dialect known as Old Avestan. The original collection of the Avesta, known to have existed in the ninth century (two centuries after the Muslim takeover of Persia), included some 21 books. Much of the text was lost in subsequent years, the present text being the result.

In addition to the Avesta, Zoroastrians recognize a second level of holy writings that were written and compiled in the centuries of the Sassanian Persian Empire (third to seventh centuries CE). They are distinguished by being written in a later Persian dialect called Pahlavi. These texts include commentaries on the Gathas and summaries of the lost Avesta texts. Although the Pahlavi texts have an important role, the Avesta remains the primary sacred text.

Leadership in the Zoroastrian community is supplied by the priests, identified by their all-white clothing, a symbol of the high value placed on purity and cleanliness in Zoroastrian culture. They oversee the temples, at the center of which are the ever-burning fires, which are symbols of righteousness. Fire is a key reality in Zoroastrian life and culture. It symbolizes light and ties the believer to the heavens through the fiery lightning bolt—and acknowledges the importance that fire has had in the daily life of individuals, at least in pretechnological cultures. The Gathas speak of fire as the creation of Ahura Mazda and set fire as the superior symbol of divinity, as opposed to the idols, which it replaced. The primary fire is the Atash Bahram, which is created with special rituals of consecration and remains burning brightly in the primary hall of a temple. Lesser fires, the Atash-I-Aduran and the Dadgah, are used for minor rituals and as the center of space used for daily prayers.

Youth are initiated into the faith by passing through a simple ceremony that begins with learning a set of prayers. On the day of the ceremony, they engage in some purification rituals and don a sacred shirt. Performing ablution rituals will be a standard beginning to all sacred acts in the future. The heart of the rather brief ceremony is the reception of the sacred cord, called a *kusti*, from a priest. The cord is wrapped three times around the waist over the shirt, and then tied with a simple knot. The ceremony is like a wedding, a moment for general celebration by friends and relatives. The full member of the faith is expected to engage in prayer five times daily (similar to Muslim practice) before a fire. During the prayers, the *kusti* is untied and retied.

The Zoroastrian Calendar

The Zoroastrian calendar has undergone a variety of transformation over the years. The traditional calendar had twelve 30-day months with five days added at the end of each year. By the beginning of the 11th century, the date of the beginning of the year had drifted considerably from the spring equinox, and the celebration of the season no longer fit the time for celebration. A revision was instituted in

2006, with plans for an added month periodically to keep the calendar aligned. This calendar is called the *Shahenshahi* (or imperial) calendar.

The Iranians appear to have made that addition of the needed month in their calendar on one occasion, but the Indian Zoroastrians never did, thus creating a 30-day difference in the two calendars. In succeeding centuries, as the needed changes were neglected, the calendar gradually drifted again.

In 1720, the visit of an Iranian priest among his fellow believers in India resulted in a branch of the Indian Zoroastrians eventually reforming their calendar (in 1745). The new calendar in use in Iran and among the reformists in India came to be called the *Kadmi* calendar. The calendar used by most of the Indian Zoroastrians, the Farsis, was called the *Shahenshahi* or imperial calendar.

Then in 1906, a calendar reform movement was initiated by the Zarthosti Fasili Sal Mandal, or Zoroastrian Seasonal-Year Society. The *Fasli* calendar, as it became known, included two prominent features: (1) New Year's Day was located on the spring or vernal equinox, and (2) it used an old Egyptian-Zoroastrian format with 12 months of 30 days each, with five days added at the end of the year and a leap year day added every four years.

The Indian Zoroastrians showed indifference to the new calendar, but in Iran quite apart from the Fasli movement, a new calendar, the Bastani calendar, was adopted by the Iranian Parliament. It incorporated the two major features of the Fasli calendar, and retained the Zoroastrian names of the months. Subsequently, the *Bastani* calendar was accepted by the majority of Zoroastrians. Only in Yazd, an important ritual center, did the community resist, and to this day the Zoroastrians of Yazd follow the *Kadmi* calendar.

In the *Fasli/Bastani* variant of the Zoroastrian calendar, Navroz (New Year's Day) is always the day of the vernal equinox (nominally falling on March 21). In the *Shahenshahi* and *Kadmi* calendars, which do not account for leap years, the New Year's Day has drifted ahead and now occurs in August. These latter two variants of the calendar are followed by the Zoroastrians of India and around Yazd in Iran, who celebrate the spring equinox as *Jamshed-i Nouroz*, with their New Year's Day then being celebrated in August.

The Bastani Zoroastrian calendar now begins on the spring equinox (March 21 on the Common Era calendar) with 12 months of 30 days each:

1. Frawardin
2. Ardwhisht
3. Khordad
4. Tir
5. Amurdad
6. Shahrewar
7. Mihr



Iranian Zoroastrians gather and share food during Farvardigan in Tehran on April 8, 2009. (AP/Wide World Photos)

8. Aban
9. Adur
10. Dae
11. Wahman
12. Spendarmad

Zoroastrian Holidays

Among the important rituals to which Zoroastrians must periodically give attention are funerals. Rituals are designed to deal with the uncleanness of the body of the deceased and to assist the soul on its way. Traditionally, the body is placed on a high tower and its flesh devoured by vultures and the bones bleached by the sun. Today, cremation is more common, especially in the West. The funeral is then directed toward the soul, which is believed to linger close by for three days. The funeral is done the day after the death, but the priests continue the rituals for the deceased for the next several days. The family joins in important good-bye activities on the fourth day. Commemoration of the deceased will continue monthly for the next year and then annually for the next 30 years at the annual ceremony for the dead. The day may be celebrated in the temple or in people's homes.

The last 10 days of the Zoroastrian calendar (which include the last five days of the last month and the five days added to the year before the New Year begins) are known as the *Fravardegan* (also spelled Farvardagân) or *Muktad* days. During

these days, believers offer special prayers for the *fravashis* (the divine essence, not to be confused with the soul) of their departed loved ones. During this period, it is believed that the *fravashis* of the righteous dead descend from the spiritual realm into the material world in order to bless those who have remembered and prayed for them.

The annual time of special acknowledgment of the deceased is just one holy period ritualized by Zoroastrians. The most important are the seven obligatory holy days that acknowledge the one God Ahura Mazda and the six Holy Immortals, Nowruz, or “New Day” (which celebrates the beginning of the year according to the Zoroastrian calendar), and the six *gahambars*, or days of obligation. The Zoroastrian year has six seasons, with one of the *gahambars* (festivals) in each season. Celebration of the *gahambars* is largely limited to the Zoroastrian community, as nonmembers are not invited to Zoroastrian temples.

Nowruz is celebrated on the first day of the Zoroastrian month of Frawardin. The first of the *gahambars* follows at the end of April, with others approximately every two months. The five-day *gahambar* festivals are observed with prayers, ritual offerings, and communal feasts designed to give thanks to Ahura Mazda for his many bounties and to acknowledge the change of seasons. The *gahambars* and their approximate dates (for those following the Bastani calendar) on the Common Era calendar are:

Gahambar Hamaspathmaedem (March 16–20)

Gahambar Maidyozarem (April 30–May 4)

Gahambar Maidyoshem (June 29–July 3)

Gahambar Paitishahem (to celebrate the creation of the earth, September)

Gahambar Ayathrem (to celebrate the creation of plant life, October 12–16)

Gahambar Maidyarem (to celebrate the creation of animals, December)

In addition, there are two holidays celebrating the religion’s founder, Zarathustra (or Zoroaster):

Khordad Sal, or the Birth of Zarathustra (March 26)

Death of Zarathustra (December 26); known in India as Zartusht-no-diso or Zarhost No Deeso

Recent History

The movement of Zoroastrians to India beginning in the ninth century created two somewhat separated communities. Given their poverty and existence in a more-or-less hostile climate, there was little contact between them over the next centuries, and each community developed its own distinctive customs while trying to preserve its community and faith. Some changes came to the communities as they began to interact with the British in the 18th and 19th centuries. The rise of British

power in India preceded the emergence of the Parsees as a well-to-do trading community. In the 18th century, they had developed trading centers in the Orient (the history of which continues in the small Parsee community still found in Hong Kong).

As the British entered East Africa, Zoroastrians relocated to Zanzibar, Mombassa, and Nairobi, from where they expanded inland. By the mid-20th century, though remaining a somewhat separatist community culturally and religiously, they became prosperous, with members assuming leading roles in the business community and the professions. As decolonization proceeded, the Parsees were among the Asians who were viewed as having secured their position because of colonial advantages, and pressure came to bear on many to leave—especially during the regime of Idi Amin in Uganda. Rather than return to India, many Parsees relocated to the West. The largest community has emerged in London and its immediate environs, but scattered communities have also appeared across the United States and Canada, and more recently in Australia.

Meanwhile in India, the Parsee community had tended to shift from Gujarat southward toward Mumbai and into what is now Pakistan. The largest communities currently are in Mumbai and Karachi. In both countries, Parsees have become prominent business leaders and, on occasion, have served in important political posts.

The Zoroastrian community in Iran almost disappeared at the end of the 19th century, but through the 20th century, it experienced a revival, growing fivefold. Zoroastrians have enjoyed guarantees of religious freedom articulated in the 1906 Constitution of Iran, and toleration under the post-1979 changes wrought by the Islamic Revolution. They are expected to observe Islamic codes of public conduct. They are represented at the Majlis (parliament) and serve in the armed forces. Furthermore, many members of these religions fought side by side with Muslim Iranians in the Constitutional Uprising of the late 19th century that finally resulted in the Constitution of 1906.

A visit by a group of Parsee priests to Iran in the late 1990s found that in spite of the revival, much was still lacking in the Iranian Zoroastrian community. The religion is, to put it bluntly, in shambles. There was no place where the major ritual ceremonies could be performed. None of the priests were holding the *barashoom*, the purification ceremony necessary to perform the “inner” rituals, which can be done only by a priest in the sacred space in the temple. There are fire temples in several cities, but some did not have the fires burning. The priests are largely uneducated, and many do not wear their priestly garb. Many laypeople do not wear the sacred shirt and cord. Although discouraged somewhat by what they had observed, the delegation held out hope for the continued revival and rebuilding of the Iranian community with assistance from India and the West.

Currently, Zoroastrians may be seen as divided into two primary communities, one based in Iran and the other in India, with both communities represented by diaspora communities in Africa and the West. The communities are further

divided by what might be seen as traditionalist and modernist wings. The latter group has adapted to life in urban centers and the modern West. Traditionalists adhere with more strictness to older rituals and prayer life, and pay attention to the laws of purity relative to women in their menstrual cycle and the bodies of the dead (traditionally, there were people set apart as unclean, whose job was to handle corpses). They eschew cremation and demand disposal of corpses by carrion birds and the sun. They do not sanction marriage outside the faith, and do not engage in attempts to convert others to Zoroastrianism.

In the West, several organizations have arisen to serve the Zoroastrian community. In 1980, an international group of Zoroastrian leaders founded the World Zoroastrian Organization, based in London, out of an expressed desire especially among diaspora Zoroastrians for an international structure to protect, unite, and sustain what is a very small community, almost invisible in the pluralistic West. In North America, where many Parsees migrated after 1965, a number of local Zoroastrian associations were established. In 1987, a number of these associations came together to create the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. Many of these associations, representative of the more modernist trends in the Western Zoroastrian community, also support the World Zoroastrian Organization. There are several local associations of Iranian Zoroastrians in North America, primarily along the Canadian and U.S. West coasts.

As early as 1962, a World Zoroastrian Congress was held in Tehran, Iran. Successive congresses have been held irregularly, the ninth meeting having been in Dubai in 2009.

J. Gordon Melton

See also Fravardegan; Gahambars; Now Ruz; Zarathustra, Commemoration days of.

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